A BRAHMIN WITHOUT CASTE

In the world, the loved one dies—or appears to die.
Whatever is desired or loved that is merely conditional will inevitably die.
One who observes this with true feeling and realization finds what is
Deathless in others. True Love is devoted to what is Undying.

R K Mishra

Rishi Kumar Mishra (1932-2009)

AN OUT OF THE BOX THINKER

N. Ram

This note is a brief appreciation of R.K. Mishra, a complex and multi-faceted personality known to me as a journalist and intellectual interested in ideas.

He clearly started out on the Left, but also interacted with other political players. When asked left, right or centre, he refused to be labelled, but instead chose to interact with everybody in government and in the opposition. and when he got people he was in sync with together, he could play a catalytic role. That is exactly what he did when he was involved in the back channel or Track II talks with Pakistan, which helped revive with great difficulty and against the odds the process of contact and dialogue between India and Pakistan, which ultimately led to good outcomes.

He obviously believed in resolving conflicts. That, incidentally, is an approach which in South asia could have been applied to better effect than the rigid ones hitherto. One cannot overcome challenges subjectively, but with fresh thinking and tremendous effort one can make progress. RK was obviously unhappy with the abnormal situation that prevailed in South asia, primarily between India and Pakistan, and was fully aware of the problems that could not be sidestepped between them.

In this sense he moved out of and beyond all conventional roles and mind sets and made no bones about playing mediator and peacemaker without exaggerating the role of any individual or party, but focussing on the best interests of both sides in the dispute.

This highlights the lifelong contributions of RK, who lived a long life, a rich life, and showed a lot of personal heroism in tackling cancer with grace and resilience.

RK had progressive ideas although he refused to be labelled or branded, saying, 'I am not right or left but I am upright!.' He mixed many strands in his personality. and made some kind of a record by becoming the editor of *Patriot* and *Link*, two great publications, at a very young age through sheer dint of work and ability. No godfather, no other advantages except his sincerity, talent and progressive ideas. He was a progressive liberal, not in the European sense, but in the Indian context. This did include his taking an interest in religion. He was a devotee of the Kanchi Shankaracharya and wrote books on the Vedas, but was always imbued with a sense of rationality. This illustrates that he was not afraid of different, apparently contradictory areas of activity even if he were to be criticised and misunderstood for these. His ideas on national or international issues were always progressive.

RK was an internationalist, sometimes misconstrued as a nationalist because he dealt with national issues. But the very fact that, against all odds, he worked so hard on India- Pakistan relations highlights this point. He thought in global terms without ever forgetting that his roots were in India. Possibly this explains why he took an interest in so many issues including the failed attempt to resolve the Ayodhya dispute as a member of the National Integration Council along with Nikhil

Chakravarthy and others. Despite the failure the sincerity of the effort stood out, which shows that RK thought big on the national stage. Deeply interested as he was in policy formulations and ideas, RK's most enduring contribution was establishing the Observer Research Foundation.

I appreciate the concept and the methods followed in the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and though initially I too had some reservations, RK stressed its independent character: there was no interference of any kind, no lobbies promoted through ORF. I saw it work particularly well on Sri Lanka. Though these are concerns about which people cannot come out openly, I do believe that some of the best debates anywhere in the world have taken place on Sri Lanka in the ORF Chennai. And, even if half the ideas had been promoted and publicised, the Sri Lanka situation could have been improved. The problem there is both political and military and I really appreciate the broad- ranging approach the ORF discussions took on the issue.

RK's office in Delhi is not starved of resources and he used them well, with interest in publications, the Press and so on. Whenever The Hindu published an article by somebody at ORF without acknowledgement, we would invariably get a gentle reminder about proper journalistic practices. I must add that these situations were always handled with grace and sophistication, a hallmark of RK.

A recent interview in the *Rediff* throws a lot of light on RK, his relations with Dhirubhai and Mukesh Ambani, his interaction with western think tanks, the emphasis on independence, research, publications, the need to promote awareness, interact with the media, with other intellectuals, and allow people with other views space—all of these make for a good think tank and RK achieved this.

I also appreciate his personal qualities—his grace, his calm under great stress, his way of approaching people and the catholicity to have friends in all camps without compromising or losing his soul.

I salute him for his contributions.

JOURNALISM

SOMEONE REALLY DIFFERENT

Mohammad Sayeed Malik

As I get down to writing this piece 'on' Mishraji, after a nearly five-decade long habit of writing 'for' the publications headed or co-headed by him, my mind is filled with thoughts and memories. Our close, long professional association had its share of highs and lows, but I cannot recall even a single moment of any unpleasantness in our personal relationship. I can never thank Mishraji enough for having done me a great personal favour. But for his determined intervention in breaking my reluctance to work outside of Kashmir, I might have missed the opportunity to step into a wider horizon and attain what, today, I can humbly claim to have achieved. But of that, later.

I would confine the recollections of my association with R.K. Mishra to three fateful developments of national significance which, in my opinion, bring out the different facets of his personality.

The first of these relates to the turbulent events of 1984, when Punjab was in turmoil. Mishraji joined a select group of Delhi-based senior journalists who accompanied the then President of India, Giani Zail Singh, on his first visit to the Golden Temple in Amritsar after the 'Blue Star' military operation in June that year. Their eyewitness accounts of the devastation filled the Capital's newspapers and journals. The group included well-known names in the profession, many of whom penned eminently moving impressions of their visit. In my opinion, Mishraji's front-page piece in 'Patriot and a more detailed write-up in the weekly 'Link newsmagazine stood out among them. They were afire with the agony of a deeply hurt devotee, an anguished Indian and, above all, of a disturbed soul. Such writings could have only come from the real pain of true empathy.

The trauma of surveying a bullet-riddled Harmander Saheb complex, the crumbling Akal Takht building and the overhanging stench of blood and mayhem formed the backdrop of Mishraji's foreboding about its evil consequences, which did not take long to unfold. His impressions of what he saw-- and what he foresaw—produced a memorable piece of journalistic excellence. His prognosis did not square up with the prevalent theme of 'nationalist' discourse, but it did not take too long to establish its authenticity. Mishraji's choice to swim against the current, whenever his soul impelled him, earned him jealousy and animosity. As I was to learn later, Mishraji was deep into spirituality. May be that was the real reservoir of his inner strength. He was a picture of calm and serenity in moments of crisis of which there were no dearth in his life—personal as much as professional.

My second point of reference for paying tribute to Mishraji dates back to eight years after the 'Blue Star' tragedy, by which time public life across India had been ominously vitiated by a surge of across-the-board intolerance. The media domain was no exception. The demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992 brought it out rather too closely for my comfort. A strange change in the body language of one's colleagues said it all. Sanctity of journalistic objectivity seemed to have lost its meaning in reporting and analysing highly sensitive issues.

Once more I found Mishraji almost standing alone under the roof where we worked then. He was his usual self—composed, calm and, noticeably sad. The type of inspiration provided by him at that time found an expression in his own words. The title of his front page write-up in the next day's edition of the *Observer* was 'Black Sunday'. Again, he poured out his innermost feelings of hurt and anguish, pinpointing the evils of the vitiated atmosphere.

Mishraji viewed the issue in the wider context of India's civilizational tradition of tolerance and bemoaned its gradual erosion. He visualised its far reaching consequences that continue to extract a heavy price from the country and its people. It was through his intervention that the caption of the next day's news story carried the words 'Babri Masjid' instead of 'Disputed Structure' demolished at Ayodhya. The delicate nuances of the difference between the two definitions opted for by the media indeed became a sort of dividing line between two schools of thought. Once again, it was Mishraji's fate to swim against the tide, hold his head high above water. I never found him regretting his choice, in 1984 or 1992. That was the strength of his inspirational leadership. That is not to say that he was infallible. But I have no need to dwell on that, as there were always 'well wishers' ready to update them for our 'benefit'.

The third point of reference in this tribute pertains to Mishraji's little known role in paving the way for a thaw in Kashmir. For obvious reasons of confidentiality not many details can be revealed in this case. Long before Mishraji's name burst on the national/international scene as an interlocutor (with Niaz A Naik of Pakistan), he had built a constructive rapport with the alienated segment of the Kashmir leadership. I know it for sure that this bonding was purely based on one- to-one understanding. The type of patience and endurance he had to show in this laborious initiative was revealing. Although I was supposed to know the Kashmiri leaders better than him, I learnt much more about their mental make up from observing their interaction with Mishraji. There was nothing to gain, much to lose, in this tricky exchange. Yet Mishraji took the plunge. Whether they agreed with him or not, most of the leaders who came in contact with him in this process developed a lasting personal equation with him. I have not found anyone doubting Mishraji's intentions and that is saying a lot in the muddied politics of Kashmir, where 'who is whose' is a more relevant question than 'who is who'.

Renukaji supported her husband's efforts on a different plane. She initiated a number of beneficial social service projects across the disturbed Kashmir Valley and pursued them with vigour. The beneficiaries were the victims of prolonged violence and disrupted normal life. Mishraji's approach in this case was neither political nor diplomatic; it was intrinsically humane. That much is evident in the enduring impact of his effort at the personal level, although the Kashmir knot continues to be as obstinate as ever.

Lastly, I owe personal gratitude to Mishraji for 'dragging' me out of Kashmir against all my resistance. He found me 'stagnating', but did not succeed in making me opt for change. After initially failing to nudge me out of Srinagar to Delhi, he succeeded in motivating my family to push me out. And they are thankful too. Being back in Delhi ('big village', as Mishraji used to call the Capital of the gossip market) after 20 years, I am richer in experience and broader in outlook. Thank you, Mishraji!

IMPORTANT LESSONS

Chandan Mitra

I have been a part of Link House; the Pioneer office has been located there since 1991. This is the same place from which Mishraji once used to operate as editor of Patriot when I first met him. So the feeling of his spirit and him being somewhere around in this world of journalism has been there with me for a long, long time. I later joined the *Observer* of which he was the Chairman of the Editorial Board. It was then that I actually discovered Mishraji—the depth of his knowledge and his ability to articulate that knowledge in very simple, lucid ways and impart it to anybody who was willing to learn.

He taught me two very important things, one very personal and one philosophical. Once, he took some action which greatly upset me. So I went up to him with my resignation letter. He smiled, made me sit down, and told me, "Chandan, when you are very upset, when you think great wrong has been done to you, never react the same day. Just give it 24 hours. Sleep overnight, you will think differently the next morning". Since then I have always tried to practice it in real life and I can't describe how valuable that one tip has been. It is a great lesson for which I will always be indebted to Mishraji.

Another thing he once told me: He said the difference between the western mind and the Indian mind is that the western mind is linear in thinking and the Indian mind is cyclical, because there are layers and layers of consciousness in the Indian mind. When we rationalize, we look at innumerable possibilities, interactions of possibilities and then reach a very complex resolution of problems. Which is why, sometimes if there is a problem you should not go and solve it immediately. By letting the problem develop, you sometimes allow it to settle down, because 99 out of 100 times a problem resolves itself, whereas if you intervene prematurely the problem may worsen and the wounds may fester.

This is a deep fundamental and philosophical point which I have always tried to figure out: why is it that people of different parts of the world interpret and see things differently from one another?

I was never really aware that he was such a deep scholar of the texts, the scriptures, and India's intellectual history and tradition till he wrote *Before the Beginning and After the End*. When I tried to carry an excerpt in The Pioneer, I did not know where to begin and where to end. That was the depth and range of his knowledge and he never retained anything for himself. Whatever he learnt, whatever he experienced, whatever knowledge he acquired, like a true rishi, he passed on to anybody who cared to learn. I did and am the richer for that.

JOURNALISM

MEMORIES AROUND R.K. MISHRA

J. Sri Raman

Less a personal reminiscence about R.K. Mishra, this piece is more about a period and a political-media institution that happened to bring others and us together for what may today seem an all too brief a space in post-Independence history.

Politically, the early sixties were the best of times to some, and the worst of times to others. The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 gave India's Right, with more than a far-right fringe, its first significant opening. The predominantly Left-of-Centre political landscape of the decade since the first general election of 1951 already seemed to belong to a distant past when Jawaharlal Nehru passed away in 1964.

Patriot was born in this twilight of the Nehruvian era, in 1963, an addition of a different kind to the newspapers of New Delhi. The *Link* newsmagazine, brought out by the same group of Congress Socialists of the Quit India vintage, had been around since 1958. But it was the daily that was to make more of a difference—certainly to many of us setting out on the familiar journey from the days of college life—as dropouts or otherwise—to desperate job-seekers in the arena of journalism.

By the time some of us came to the profession laced with our bohemian ideas, the political ambiance seemed to have changed considerably. The late sixties were the best of times, politically, to those for whom the early sixties were the worst. And vice versa. Indira Gandhi had arrived on the scene and set out on the leftward (or left-seeming or left-backed, take your pick) lap of her race to power. *Patriot*, predictably, sided with her.

The period should have made a difference to the paper. But it did not. It remained a peripheral member of the "parivar" in New Delhi's Press area, facetiously referred to as its Fleet Street.

Periphery—if not pariah-hood—was its place there, not merely or even mainly because of its politics. *Patriot* was an outcaste, mainly because it did not fit into the general pattern of press ownership. It stuck out like a sore thumb because it was not bound to a business house.

Patriot, of course, had powerful backers in the political domain as an ardent supporter of the Congress—Communist Party of India (CPI) alliance of the time. Some of its detractors scoffed at the "superpower" patronage it ostensibly received and its pro-Soviet stance, even as the pro-US fervour of some other papers was considered a mark of the free press. All this certainly did not help *Patriot* to enter the club of the corporate- controlled "national newspapers" as an equal member.

Cub reporters like me and other colleagues were, off and on, made acutely conscious of this class or caste-like division in the press camp or community. R. K. Mishra was not one of us. He had been a correspondent for *Link* since 1960 and for *Patriot* since its inception, in distant Jaipur, where the paper did not face

quite the same problem of coexistence with its national-level non-peers. But we all knew him from his dispatches and his byline, which Patriot allowed only on some pages besides its Sunday magazine.

Even Edattata Narayanan, the editor-in-chief, rarely used a byline. Everyone, however, knew exactly what he had written. So unmistakably acerbic and sardonic was his style. Proud of the "quality of my venom", on which legendary editor Pothan Joseph had once complimented him, Narayanan used to provoke and thrill with his whiplashing attacks on assorted adversaries. He once called a corporate body, to which the powers-that-be kowtowed far too often, "a holy cow because it can be milked". Another time, he annoyed Aruna Asaf Ali, co-founder of the paper, by sneering at some prominent Congressmen as "petty little Rasputins" for taking a right-wing position on a then topical issue of the right to property. And, his "Fifth Column", appearing occasionally in the aforementioned space of the editorial page, spewed fire on a range of often renamed but obvious and identifiable foes.

(He could also make his and the paper's silence eloquent. He did so when, at the height of the Emergency (1975-77), Patriot blacked out Sanjay Gandhi, defying official pressures and punishments. It is a different matter that this act of defiance does not figure among the feats of anti-Emergency heroism, to which the "mainstream" press keeps harking back.)

The paper, however, was not all Narayanan's prose. Along with such purple passages went some very pedestrian stuff and often ham-handedly partisan reporting. Patriot served inconsistent fare, with crude propaganda sharing its columns with some very refined specimens of radical-left writing. R. K. Mishra's contributions did not fall into either of these categories.

He was content to be a meticulous reporter, preferring to spice up his stories with facts and figures, presented in simple language rather than with other rhetorical devices. His dispatches on political and developmental issues (such as the ones relating to the Indira Gandhi Canal then in the making) provided reliable and abundant material for leader-writers like me. He preserved his style through the whole period of his rise to the top in the *Patriot-Link* establishment.

Besides reading his reports, we in Delhi heard occasional, quintessentially journalistic gossip about his alleged proximity to Rajashthan's strongman and three-time chief minister, Mohan Lal Sukhadia and, consequently, the clout he was said to wield in Jaipur despite being just a correspondent of a paper that suffered the status of a poor cousin in the national press. R. K. Mishra, however, remained a remote figure until he was brought to Link House as the chief of *Patriot's* New Delhi bureau in the mid-seventies.

There was no mistaking the mark the energetic bureau chief made within a remarkably short time in both political and professional circles. But there was no mistaking, either, the resistance he encountered during his rapid rise to the paper's editorship. The strong reservations some of us had about him hardly sufficed to stop him, though he was curious to know the reasons for the resistance.

I left *Patriot* in the late seventies and spent five years as a freelancer, including two in war-torn Kabul. When I returned, it was almost as if an invitation were waiting for me. A common friend in the paper contacted me, asking me on the

editor-in-chief's behalf to rejoin it. When I met R. K. Mishra again, what struck me most was the utter absence of any resentment over my part in the in-house resistance that may not have mattered unduly but must have hurt.

From 1984, I spent five years as a re-born leader-writer, working closely with R. K. Mishra as he tried to repackage and reshape *Patriot*. The following are just a few brief observations about his editorial style, which rarely finds little more than a passing mention in the tributes to his role in Track Two diplomacy, conflict resolution, and security research—subjects too scary for a simple scribe.

The first thing he did on taking over—and very few remember this—was to bring computers into staid old Link House. He faced nearly as much resistance and ridicule here as Rajiv Gandhi and his "whiz kids" did for introducing information technology in India's post offices and railway reservation centres. He persisted, as Rajiv did, and few today can remember what the fuss was all about.

Be that as it may, it's men, not machines, that make for journalism. A historic incident that occured during R. K. Mishra's editorship in *Patriot* was the assassination of Indira Gandhi. It goes to his great credit that, despite the paper's closeness to Indira, *Patriot* put the focus of its coverage on the grisly anti-Sikh riots that followed the assassination.

(A personal aside. On hearing that the riots had spread to my area of residence, R.K. Mishra sent me home in his car. The driver took me, my wife and our nine-month-old daughter to the safety of our home through roads lined with bloodthirsty mobs, armed with iron rods and broken bottles and stopping us every now and then to make sure that the vehicle carried no bearded passenger.)

Patriot made some apparent departures with its past under R.K. Mishra in subsequent days. In an earlier era, the paper may not have treated the V P Singh rebellion against Rajiv with any respect. Mishra told me once that the best editorial policy for *Patriot* would be a "bourgeois-liberal" one. He had inherited a paper that was not known for such a policy since its inception.

Patriot made, perhaps, the sharpest break with its past when, under RK, it took the side of a particular business house when it was singled out as the target of a sustained offensive by a big newspaper. R. K. Mishra did not see this as a violation of the policy he wished *Patriot* to pursue.

The days of *Patriot* (the national daily with a difference?) appeared numbered when R. K. Mishra left it in 1990. The paper is now merely a memory associated with a certain phase in India's political history.

For some of us, the memory of R. K. Mishra too is associated, more than anything else, with a period and a political-media institution that was its product.

GROWING WITH RK

John Dayal

I would like to remember my senior friend, former colleague and part-time guru, Rishi Kumar Mishra as a man who came close to forging a historic dialogue that could have changed the situation of the Christian community in India, prevented the bloodshed that has marked recent years and perhaps evolved a framework of creative cohesion instead of the passive tolerance we now call secularism. It was a set of circumstances or possibly someone's attempt at sabotage that finally the dialogue could not take place, leaving many people very frustrated over the opportunity lost.

I had left *The Observer* long ago. In fact I had not met RK, as we called him behind his back, for perhaps more than a year. Newspapers had been reporting increasing violence against Christian priests in several states. I ran into RK and his wife Renuka at the Delhi airport, as we sometimes did and he told me to expect a call from him soon. Sure enough he called up one morning asking me whether it would be possible for me to help put together a meeting of senior Catholic and Protestant religious leaders and lay men, interested in responding to the desire of a senior and much venerated Shankaracharya, without any pre-conditions and agendas. The Church has had, over the decades, several structured and formal dialogues with Hindu leaders, but they have never really gone beyond the photo opportunity, so to speak. Occasionally, Church leaders have also been gang-pressed into meeting with the political bosses of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, but not surprisingly, those meetings have been doomed to failure, as the Sangh does not represent the wider Hindu community of faith. The Shankaracharyas are another matter altogether and meeting them would have taken the interaction to an entirely different level.

Several of us, a Bishop or so, scholars from the highest theological seminaries and lay leaders agreed it was important to respond. RK too was excited and a meeting was soon fixed to take place during the Shankaracharya's next Delhi visit. We drove up to RK's home in Sarvapriya Vihar, tastefully done up by Renuka and waited. After a pregnant wait, a rather disappointed RK told us the meeting would not be possible after all. There was no need to ask further questions. He too was sad at the lost opportunity.

I remembered this often, when Kandhamal in Orissa burst into flames on Christmas eve, 2007 and then again in August 2008. Earlier, we had talked about a project on the situation of the Christians in India for the Observer Research Foundation, but could not sit down to finalize the details. It would have been worthwhile.

That was my lasting impression of RK from the time I first met him in the early 1970s, soon after I joined Link House as a sub-editor. He was never the mere journalist, your typical mofussil correspondent content to be reporting the doings of the big fish in local small tanks. For RK, journalism was not 'in your face' pontificating, just as it was not mere stenographic narration of events and occasions. But though he soon became a participant and then quickly an insider in the nation's political cauldron, it could never be said of him that politics, or a

seat in the Rajya Sabha, were the ends he saw as final fulfillment. He also differed with the young and impatient brood of journalists that followed him into politics in this that, though he consorted more than most with the rich and the powerful, lived well and liked the finer things of life, he firmly shunned patent avarice and showing off king making power plays. At the end of the day, his easy travel across lines of media, business and the intellectual world earned him many friends, much respect and, I suspect, a little disdain and considerable envy, possibly even some hate mail.

He was the *Patriot* correspondent in Jaipur when giants ruled the state. A Hindi journalist who had started out in Calcutta with local and then major national newspapers, RK switched to the English media with little difficulty. And though he would never claim literary pretensions, his knowledge of Hindi literature and the Indian tradition was phenomenal, something I discovered as a callow young reporter listening to him and his fellow correspondent, Bhawa Nand Uniyal, trade wisdom and insights as they explored the nuances of the state's politics with tremendous felicity. This must have brought him close to many in power and he could persuade diverse political leaders in the state to sponsor him to the Rajya Sabha as an Independent in 1974.

That was a difficult time and the imposition of the Emergency by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made RK's position as an unbiased reporter untenable as long as he continued to be a parliamentarian. *Patriot* had taken a very complex line on the Emergency. It challenged the Opposition's call to the Indian Army to rebel, but it also opposed with greater vehemence the emergence of Indira Gandhi's younger son Sanjay as an extra-constitutional centre of authority in the Emergency regime. Those were really hard days for us, but many of us perhaps saw in them a future opportunity.

Reviewers later said the best book exposing the excesses of the Emergency was written by two young reporters of *Patriot* and *Link!* Though he withdrew for a while from *Patriot*, RK continued coming to Link House and we did learn much from our own "source", as it were.

With the successive deaths of Editor P.Vishwanath and then Founder Editor, Edattata Narayanan, R.K. Mishra led the reconstruction and modernisation of Link House. RK, years ahead of his time, saw a way out in technology. Let it be on record that *Patriot* was the second newspaper after *The Hindu* to computerise and its journalists were among the first in the country to take to Desktops! Indira Gandhi inaugurated the modern press and was delighted to be able to read the first copy of the new *Patriot* while she was still in the building—and it had her picture already printed. The miracle of computerized printing.

Those were heady days. RK also launched plans for a modern *Patriot on Sunday*, started an in-house training programme for promising young men and women—many of whom are stars in the media today—and experimentation in investigative and descriptive journalism which saw *Patriot* reporters and cameramen operate out of Russia and Vietnam, Cuba and Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Poland. RK's own interviews with the top leaders of East Europe and his prescient warnings on the balkanization threat that India faced, are now matters of media history. *Patriot's* reporting of the 1984 riots and other incidents of communal violence, as much as the news clippings of the Emergency, find respectable place in the footnotes of research papers and academic tomes.

RK's modernisation of the Link House press and his efforts to shore up the finances of the newspaper by subsidising it through India's first commercial business directories with the concurrence of the Founder and Chairperson, the legendary freedom fighter Aruna Asaf Ali, are still a matter of much controversy. This led to much bad blood and triggered off the chain of circumstances that eventually led to the closure of the *Patriot* and *Link*, marking an end to an important chapter in the history of Indian media. Few now remember that in the 1960s, it was mandatory for aspirants to the Indian Administrative and Foreign Services to read *Link*, then the nation's only political newsmagazine. History will be the judge of this chapter in RK's life in the life of the newspaper that he and all of us so loved. In passing, I may also mention his love for sports, though he often scolded me and a couple of other colleagues for playing too much chess in the office, when we should have been typing our stories at sixty words a minute! But then Mercy, my wife, and I were also recipients of his affection.

Possibly the last mention I would make of *Patriot* and *Link* House is in the infusion of intellectual energy that RK brought to the place. As Editor and Managing Director, he was the person behind a series of seminars, many at the India International Centre, where the country's best economists, sociologists and political scientists held forth. No one was left out: Deputy Chairman and Members of the Planning Commission, Secretaries in the ministries of Petroleum and Finance, Home and Welfare and External Affairs, analysed and dissected Plan papers, national policies and external threats. For those of us fortunate to be part of the organizing and reporting teams, these were compressed doctoral courses in contemporary Indian reality.

I should have been surprised, but was not, at the final facet that RK revealed as a philosopher and thinker on India's spiritual heritage. I did not know till recently that he had authored metaphysical works such as *"Before the Beginning and After the End: Rediscovering Ancient Insights", "The Cosmic Matrix: In the Light of the Vedas", "The Realm of Supraphysics: Mind, Energy and Matter—in the light of the Vedas" and "The Ultimate Dialogue: The Fusion of Knowledge, Intelligence and Action".* One of these days, I am going to procure a set of those books and read them. It is a matter of regret that I will not be able to discuss them with him, in person.

STRATEGIC VISIONARY

Bharat Bhushan

My last appointment with RK never came through. His secretary called me to say that he had advanced his visit to Mumbai by a day and would call me on his return to Delhi. Alas, that never happened.

The last intensive interaction I had with him was in July 2008. The Manmohan Singh Government was fighting for its survival over the Indo-US civilian nuclear co-operation deal and had moved for a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha. I had gone to see RK over a cup of tea at his Vasant Vihar residence. I asked him whether he thought the government's gamble would pay off. He was recovering from his illness, had lost weight and looked a pale shadow of his former self. His eyes were shining with interest, yet he feigned ignorance of the political developments, saying that he had been at home and was not aware of what was going on.

After much play-acting and feigned disinterest on his part, I jokingly challenged him to come clean. He then took out a writing pad where he had jotted down the exact details of how many MPs were likely to vote for the government, how many were ranged against it and, as a bonus, a comprehensive list of those up for sale! We compared notes every evening till on July 21, a day before the vote, he told me that the game was up—the government had stitched up a majority as the last of the hold-out MPs had finally been offered the price they were asking for.

This was quintessential RK. He was deeply interested in politics and, stuck up at home or not, political news flowed to him. His interest in politics and matters of policy was not mere vicarious pleasure. He was intensely political and understood Indian political developments like no one I have met. He sought to influence it based on a sense of India's destiny and its rightful place in the world. RK was an unsung *Patriot* whose each political action was the result of the understanding that India must gain its rightful weight in South Asia and in the world.

I came to know him essentially in the last one and half decades of his life. And I found in him a great teacher—each time one met him one gained new insights and learned something new.

Almost nothing about RK was spontaneous. He did not suffer fools and nothing that he did not want to become public could be extracted from him—no information, no insights, no interesting anecdotes with morals at the end of them—especially if he thought he was talking to an undeserving fool. I suspect I was half way to being accepted as someone he would not mind suffering once in a while, when he passed away.

In retrospect, I think RK influenced my life in three significant ways.

He taught me that it was important to take full responsibility for one's actions. We Indians, he used to say, often blame others for what are essentially our mistakes. He would point out that we would not think twice, for example, before saying *"Mere paon mein kaanta chubh gaya* (literally, a thorn has pricked my feet)" or

that "an accident happened to me" instead of saying, "I was walking barefoot and that is why I got a thorn in my foot" or that "I was careless and caused an accident." I never heard him describe events in his life and claim that they just happened to him. Only death happened to RK. The rest, I am sure, was well thought out.

The second important lesson that I learnt from him was to never underestimate the power of one—the ability of an individual to influence the course of events. I think his involvement in politics and behind-the-scene diplomacy was the result of this basic belief. His successful role as Indira Gandhi's emissary during the formation of Bangladesh perhaps confirmed this belief.

It may be too early to judge the impact of his forays into the Kashmir issue and in India-Pakistan affairs. However, by no stretch of imagination can talking to Kashmiri separatists, gaining the trust of those who, disillusioned by New Delhi, had become insular, or advising Nawaz Sharif as a friend even after the Kargil fiasco, be called small achievements. He helped create the atmosphere in which even ordinary Indians and Pakistanis could claim that the relationship between the two countries could move forward even if progress on the Kashmir issue was slow. Why, some even thought that he had helped prepare a blue-print for resolving the Kashmir issue.

It is important to remember that RK did not let his friends in Pakistan down—I suspect those who controlled the levers of power in New Delhi did not stand by him when it came to the crunch. I often requested him to let me record his role in Track-II diplomacy for posterity. However, he seemed reticent to do so and would always set some difficult preconditions—like the ten tasks of Hercules—before he would even consider talking.

The third important thing I learnt from him was that intentions by themselves are never enough. As the old man buried at Hampstead cemetery would have certainly agreed— philosophers have merely interpreted the world, the point, however, is to change it. This realization is what made RK an institution builder.

When he decided to create ORF as an independent think tank, he went about it patiently and with single-minded devotion. His detractors did not give him much of a chance to ever set up a credible think tank. He proved them wrong. The work that ORF was able to carry out and the weight it came to enjoy in the strategic community under his leadership is a testimony to his institution building capability.

There are limits to how much an individual can shape the world around him—especially when one is attempting a paradigmatic shift in political perceptions—but these limits can be pushed. To even attempt to do that one needs strategic vision. RK was such a visionary.

JOURNALISM

DISCOVERING MISHRAJI

Satish Misra

My journey with Mishraji began in December 1983. I had returned from Germany in August that year after a ten-year stay and was looking for gainful employment. Professor K P Misra, who had known Mishraji from his Jaipur days, asked me to get in touch with the *Patriot* Editor who was looking for writers on different subjects.

With some trepidation, I reached Link House and contacted his Assistant (Sushil Lunia) for an appointment. To my surprise, I was immediately called in. In the meeting, he was brief, asking me about subjects on which I could write. I told him that I was a student of International Relations and had come back from Germany to get a foothold in the country. He asked me: "Could you give me a backgrounder on the Lebanon crisis?" The issue was at its peak during those months. Next day I gave him about a1000-word report. Seeing my piece, he asked me to come back in the middle of February next year as he was busy installing the PTS printing technology at Link House.

When I met him in mid-February, he took out my piece and asked me to update it. I did so immediately. To my surprise and pleasure it appeared the next day (16 February 1984) in *Patriot* with a headline, 'Playing losing game in Lebanon'. I later came to know that he had given the headline himself.

For over three years I contributed to the editorial and other pages of *Patriot* and Link. I left *Patriot* in 1987 to join *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, but my bond with Mishraji continued to strengthen.

That marked the beginning of a 25 year-long association with him. He was a pleasant surprise each time I met him. His passion and commitment was for the country and how India could be developed to attain a place of pride in the comity of nations. Journalism for him was the vehicle for that objective and *Patriot* and *Link* the platforms of communication.

Within a year, I ran into trouble at *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. The paper's Chief of Bureau, John Dayal, was facing problems with the management and he decided to rejoin *Patriot*. As soon as Mishraji came to know about me being jobless, he asked John to find out if I too was willing to come back. I rejoined *Patriot* and so began a new chapter in our relationship, during which I learned to appreciate his keen news sense and the depth of his political understanding. In his informal style, he would often give leads and suggest ideas for a story.

A true nationalist, his understanding of the country was phenomenal. The more I interacted with him, the more I discovered newer dimensions to his personality. He began as my Editor and evolved into my guardian. He was a deep political thinker with a remarkable quality of reconciling non- antagonistic contradictions. He was a patient listener. He was an old school politician who imbibed with ease the positive aspects of modern forces. He had a clear understanding of the country's polity and its main players and, in my days of utter political confusion, a meeting with him would clear my mind and set it thinking on the right course. I

knew whom to turn to in my good and bad days.

For all of us who had grown up in a left-of- the-centre political environment, religion was anathema. Mao Zedong's words "Religion is the opium of the people" were swallowed unchallenged.

In the second half of 1989, I was assigned the BJP beat at *Patriot*. I was uncomfortable with the Sangh ideology and views. During my student days I had opposed the communal politics of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. But professionally, it was a challenge because the BJP was on an upward trajectory, riding on the back of the growing Ramjanmabhoomi temple movement. This was a period of growing communal bitterness and schism in Indian society.

I met him when the Babri Masjid was demolished—an ugly climax to the Ayodhya temple movement. Grave of mien and voice, he said: "Satishji, religion is the fourth pillar of Indian democracy. There is so much of the positive in religion" This, coming from him, shocked me, for I had always thought of him as a leftist. Later, my deep respect for him made me mull over his words in some depth, only to realize that his remark was backed by a deep understanding of things past and present—and that my own thinking process had all along been uni-dimensional.

Between 1989 and 1996, I had begun writing in *Patriot*, Delhi *Mid Day* and then in *The Tribune*. It was evident that the BJP was knocking at the doors of power and the days were not far when the saffron party would be occupying the New Delhi chair.

"Satishji, until the BJP Congressizes itself, it will not be able to remain in power", Mishraji had told me. I used the term "Congressization" of the BJP in many of my writings after that. Subsequent events confirm that the BJP did undergo a radical change between 1993 and 1998. With these words, he had once again changed my perspective and I developed a new understanding of the polity and political process in India.

He had the uncanny ability to anticipate coming events and politcal changes. He must have been convinced that the shape of international Communism was going to change. Both the big Communist powers, the Soviet Union and China, were facing a crisis and clearly he was sniffing a change in the air. Possibly that may have been the reason that *Patriot* decided to drop its red masthead and go for ordinary black.

Similarly, during the heydays of Mandal and Kamandal politics, Mishraji had already anticipated the coming changes. In 1992, when Prime Minister P.V Narasimha Rao took India on the path of economic reforms, he told me that "the age of politics of labels was over and the time had arrived for politics of content."

How true it all seems when one sees the changing parameters of Indian politics today.

Given his self-effacing nature, he would never talk about himself and even polite enquiries would be discouraged. A friend in Jaipur, Editor of a Hindi daily, had asked me to persuade Mishraji to either pen down or narrate his days in Rajasthan which were one of the most interesting periods of the state's political history. My Editor friend was keen to carry Mishraji's account of Rajasthan of the fifties and sixties in his newspaper columns as in his view Mishraji was closely

involved in shaping the state in its formative years. Mishraji smiled this away and went on to discuss other subjects of national concern.

In 2004, Professor Prodosh Aich, to whom I was introduced by Mishraji in 1985, talked to me about his (Mishraji's) book *"Before the Beginning and After the End "*. I felt miffed, being kept ignorant about something so important. I protested. Mishraji smiled and gave me a copy of the book. It took me some days to go through the book. Reading it imparted a new meaning to my world view. I was awestruck by Mishraji's understanding and comprehension of ancient Vedic literature.

His role in the Track-II diplomacy during the tenure of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif was mostly kept under the lid. But when Mishraji's opposite number across the table, Pakistan's Niaz Naik, broke the trust and leaked details of the exercise, I approached Mishraji for his version of the events.

We met over coffee at Claridges Hotel. He said "Satishji, I can give you a broad understanding, but I will not reveal anything further". I said, "Sir, it is not fair. You are denying me a story which would give me professional satisfaction, and moreover you must set the record straight". He only said, "My dialogue partner (Niaz Naik) has broken the trust and understanding arrived at before the talks began but I am not going to do the same". The politics of the country was the main point of discussion between the two of us. Whenever I met him he would ask me about the state of the political parties and the direction that they were taking.

After the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao entrusted him with the task of organizing the Congress party's media campaign for the four State Assembly elections.

I was then working at Delhi *Mid Day* and had many interactions with him. He planned the campaign with precision and commitment. He kept the tone and tenor of the campaign sober and did not allow rancour to creep in. The Congress did much better than expected and formed the government in Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. It could have done the same in Rajasthan but Mishraji's advice to the Prime Minister was that the Congress should avoid attempts at "managing" a majority.

He moved with the times. Unlike many others of his generation, he was at ease with new technologies. His command over computer technology and his use of the laptop impressed me beyond belief. He had an excellent rapport with Sam Pitroda. When Pitroda came under opposition attack, he asked me to meet him as I was covering the Ministry of Communications at *Patriot*.

We met a few times to discuss the role technology could play and whether it could be kept a non-political entity. I did some stories on the various technology missions that the Rajiv Gandhi government had launched to help the common man. The seeds of the IT revolution were being sown and Mishraji was keen that *Patriot* should take the right message to its readers.

But new technologies also troubled his multi-faceted mind. After introducing the new printing technology at Link House, his next step was to train the workers to use it. But there were over three dozen workers who refused to be trained and

soon the United India Periodicals (the company which published *Patriot* and *Link*) started coming under financial stress. Nevertheless, he kept his word that no worker would be retrenched, whatever be the financial and labour problems.

Simultaneously, Mishraji worked overtime to get work for the United India Periodicals so that Link House could turn into a financially viable institution. With his efforts, a massive project of printing the Yellow Pages directories of the newly set up Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited came to United India Periodicals.

In the second half of 1988, just when these directories were to be printed, the workers struck. The strike was aimed at delaying the printing of the directories. Mishraji was very keen that the negotiations with the workers begin at the earliest. He called me to rope in few friends from the Delhi Union of Journalists.

Despite his best efforts, the strike hurt the institution financially. Around this time, the Dhirubhai Ambani group was about to launch a newspaper, *Observer of Business and Politics.* There was a strong possibility that this newspaper could be published at the United India Periodical's printing press. *The Observer* was keen to take a floor at the Link House for its editorial and commercial operations.

Some of us, aware of the precarious financial health of the institution, were keen that the *Observer* and *Link* House do business so that *Patriot* and *Link* could recover.

But the *Patriot* trade union was adamant and there was a strike. Mishraji resigned as Managing Director and Editor of *Patriot* and *Link*. Thus began the downslide of a great institution, which finally closed down in the mid-nineties. It is ironic that soon after, some trade union leaders approached me to persuade Mishraji to help restart the paper and weekly.

Apart from the print media in which he had worked all his professional life, Mishraji had no inhibition in engaging with the emerging audio-visual media. I was awestruck watching his long interview with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, which was telecast on Doordarshan. Incidentally, it was her last interview and Mishraji had covered a wide swathe of national and international issues. After Mr Gandhi's assassination, he again came on Doordarshan in a very interesting programme called "Beyond Tomorrow", in which Mishraji presented his vision for India.

He was always ahead of the times. Pulsating with creative ideas, he had wanted to ensure United India Periodicals' financial security so that it could become a a leading media house.

With this objective, he started many projects, including a school of journalism and a media software production facility. Remember, he thought of such projects in the mid and late eighties, to be followed much later by the big media houses.

Another facet of his personality was his ready wit. I can recall one incident. In the mid '90s, Dr Karan Singh was keen to contest the presidential election and one of the BJP leaders, Mantosh Lal Sondhi, with whom I had a very close relationship from my JNU days, had invited Mishraji and Dr Karan Singh to his residence. After dinner, when we were departing, Dr Singh asked Mishraji as to when we were meeting next. Pat came the reply, *"Raja Rishi ke pas jata hai, Rishi Raja ke pas nahin* (the King goes to the Sage, the Sage does not go to the King") Mishraji

observed and we all burst into laughter.

I had enjoyed working with him during my *Patriot* days and had always wanted to work with him again. This opportunity came in June 2008, when I retired from *The Tribune*. Since 2006 I had been informally working with him on the Indian Political Review (IPR). He wanted to develop this on the lines of the Indian Economic Review. "If trends and developments of Indian economy can be documented and predicted, then surely similar trends and developments in Indian politics too can be documented", he told me sometime in 2006.

Even while fighting with the serious ailment in his last days, debility of the body failed to dull his mental powers, which remained sharp, agile and alert. It was in this state that he discussed the IPR project and I started working on it.

Ever since The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) had moved into its new campus, Uttar Pradesh had been on Mishraji's radar. He would often say that something should be done, as the state was lagging behind almost all the states. He soon got me involved in an initiative to study Uttar Pradesh. An international seminar titled "Uttar Pradesh: The Road Ahead" was held at the ORF in May 2008.

He inducted me into the ORF immediately after my retirement from *The Tribune* and located me in the Centre for Politics and Governance. In one of the meetings he said that now I would be able to work on the Uttar Pradesh project with him.

I was thrilled. Alas, my thrill lasted only a few months.

JOURNALISM

REMINISCENCES

Sitanshu Das

Until recently, I had not given much thought to Rishi Kumarji. Now, looking back, I remember Rishi Kumarji's time at a Kolkata newspaper establishment, of which the great industrialist of those days, Ramakrishna Dalmia, was the founder. But Dalmia, for us in Calcutta, was just a distant image of power. The local management of the establishment was in the hands of M K Roy, Managing Director of several Dalmia companies. The papers started with Dalmia acquiring two newspapers in Kolkata. He was a great acquirer. He had envisioned starting a chain of newspapers. At that time, he had acquired the British owned newspaper, *Times of India*, in Mumbai and the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore and in Delhi. He wanted a chain of newspapers around the entire subcontinent that was India then. The Kolkata papers were part of that chain. I joined the Bengali daily in June/July, 1948 just before the papers started publication in August 1948, a year after Independence. That is where I first met Rishi Kumarji, who was working for the Hindi newspaper.

We were the youngest members of the editorial staff. I think he had earlier worked in a newspaper called *Vishwamitra* in Kolkata. *Vishwamitra* and *Sanmarg* were the two main newspapers of Calcutta those days. Being very young and new to the profession, we became close and, as young people do, we found it easy to talk to each other. The offices were new and we did not have much to gossip about them.

I recall we two talked a lot once out of office about any and every thing around us. The Chief Editor of Lokmanya, where Rishi Kumarji worked, was Matadin Bhageria who operated from Delhi. Journalism in those early days had not become just another job. One had to have an interest in public affairs—be drawn to journalism.

I don't recall him revealing any political affiliations in our conversations. Towards 1950 he showed a keen interest in the research institute which the Socialist Party had started in Kolkata. Its name was *Khoj Parishad* (loosely translated, research centre). It was an ambitious project attracting many young intellects. That, it would seem was the closest he came to any political preferences.

Unlike me, for whom this was the first employment, he had earlier worked for another newspaper. So, in the hierarchy of *Lokmanya*, he was quite well placed. What most distressed him in those days was the suffering of the thousands of Partition refugees, open for all to see, as they had spread out over every open space available and crammed every nook and corner in Kolkata. Unlike some journalists, Rishi Kumarji had not managed to become dehumanised and felt deeply for them.

Then, around 1950, our ways parted: I joined the PTI and soon after the *Times of India* in Delhi.

Nearly 25 years later during which I had been in several countries, I returned to Delhi and found that Rishi Kumarji was a member of the Rajya Sabha from

Rajasthan. Twenty five years is a long time in a human life.

Change with age and experience is normal, but in his case responsibility had changed him vastly. He had been a slightly- built, bright-faced, light-hearted person. Now he was affable but sedate. He had been a Special Assistant to Congress President Deb Kanta Barua, a position of responsibility. He had gained a great deal of political experience from all parts of the country.

I was astonished when I spent a day in Jaipur and attended a public meeting at which Rishi Kumarji was one of the speakers. The mastery over the spoken word and the control he showed over his flow of thought amazed me. This was a new side of his capability I had not been aware of.

I was in those days working for another chain of newspapers. My responsibilities did not include Parliament. I was confined to the office. I had little chance of seeing him at work in Parliament.

But I had the occasion to see another ability he possessed when I joined the journals of which he was both Managing Director and Editor, few years later. He had succeeded the Founder Editor of *Link* and *Patriot*, namely the late Mr Edattatta Narayanan.

There had been a vacuum because Viswanath, who had been the virtual deputy editor, had pre-deceased Mr Narayanan.

This organisation was not like any other for a variety of reasons. Its whole composition was different.

Coming on board, I saw Rishi Kumarji engaged in introducing a vast technology change in the production of the journals. It was an ambitious project for an organisation which was capital starved. He managed to accomplish this with the result that the journals acquired a quality of printing which was superior to many established journals of Delhi at the time.

Another remarkable quality he was blessed with was his ability to attract young talents from various fields to his institution, even though the salaries on offer were hardly attractive.

Only his vision and dynamism could have accomplished this.

(As told to Dr Satish Misra)

JOURNALISM

A MULTI-FACETED GENIUS

P. Sreekumaran

This is no cloying eulogy from an uncritical admirer. But there is no denying that Rishi Kumar Mishraji was a multi-faceted genius. His was an incisive mind that could get to the root of a problem at the wink of an eye. Mishraji had that special ability to think about different subjects at the same time even as he talked to you about something else! And his child-like curiosity and passion for learning new things are worthy of emulation. A hard-working man himself, Mishraji was a demanding task master. But then the man loved tackling challenges and inspired you also into doing the same. It was wonderful to have worked under him. It was even more wonderful to have known Mishraji the man.

The following incidents provide a rich and revealing insight into the many-splendoured personality of the man.

It was a hectic day at the desk. The news flow was infuriatingly heavy. And worse, only one of the three sub-editors on night dutyturned up. So the two of us were struggling to meet the deadline, racing the clock. Around 10.15 at night, Mishraji walked in and came straight to the desk. He was visibly surprised to see only two of us at work. "Only two are there? Where are the others?' I said that two sub-editors had absented themselves.

In a gesture that surprised me, Mishraji volunteered to help in editing reports. Though I said that we would manage, he would not listen. He also insisted on my giving him a few 'tough' copies from the state correspondents.

Mishraji then retired to the editor's cabin. Within an hour or so he was back with the edited reports. He handed them over to me, suggesting that I have a quick glance. I thanked him and he left for home. There was no need for him to have done that. But then, that was Mishraji: always considerate and caring for the people who did not shy away from work. And he had done an excellent job of editing the reports from correspondents whose English was, to say the least, wonky!

14 February, 1988. I was on mid-shift when there was a bolt from the blue. My cousin rang up from Kerala to say that my father had been hospitalised and that I should start for home immediately. I informed my news editor, A K Painuli, and I thought I should inform Mishraji as well. So I met and informed him. He asked me how I intended to go. I said I would catch the first available train to my hometown. He did not say anything. I returned to the desk to finish my work. As I was about to leave, around 9 p.m., Mishraji's PA, Sushil Lunia came and gave me an envelope. Surprised, I asked what it was. He said, "It's your ticket for the early morning flight to Cochin on the 15th"!

Thanks to Mishraji's heart-warming gesture, I was able to talk to my father. Had I taken the train, I would not have seen him alive. The train would have reached only on the morning of the 17th. My father breathed his last on the night of the 16th.

The Union-Management talks had reached a crucial stage. The atmosphere was tense as the talks had not made much headway. The problem was paucity of funds. I suggested, on the spur of the moment, that a pay hike Mishraji had decided on for the editorial staff be put off to a future date and the money diverted towards meeting some of the demands made by the Union.

Mishraji gave me a surprised look. He got up and abruptly ended the meeting, telling the Union representatives that he would get back to them the next day. Then, he asked me to stay back. When we were alone, he told me: "Sree, I am going to meet a person whom I have not met for a long time. You have made such a spontaneous offer. I also must make an effort to raise some funds". Thus saying, he promptly left to meet that person. Later I came to know that it was none other than one of our directors, R D Bhagat.

Mishraji's mission was successful. The next day he called me and the Union representatives to tell us that he had managed to raise some funds which would take care of a few demands made by the Union. That was a classic example of Mishraji's capacity for taking on-the-spot decisions to avert a crisis.

A lot of my friends tell me Mishraji had a fiery temper. Well, I would not know, since I was never a victim of his wrath! In fact, during my 12-year association with him, I cannot recall a single occasion when he became angry. Only on one occasion, did I witness his angry outburst: it was at one of our foremen. He had made a serious mistake and Mishraji was justifiably angry. That was the time when *Patriot* had just switched over to the new technology. All of us would stay back till the wee hours of the morning. On this particular day also we left office around 3.30 a.m. On the way back, Mishraji said he should not have lost his temper and that he was a bit too harsh on the foreman. His peon Vijayaraj told me later that Mishraji had called the foreman to his room the next day to say a few words of comfort.

Patriot was Mishraji's enduring passion. He always had a soft corner for the '*Patriot's*', too. The following incident illustrates the point. A close friend of mine in the administration, Sivadasan, was in trouble. The management headed by R D Bhagat had decided to terminate his services. As he was looking for another job, Sivadasan came to me asking for help. I said I would call on Mishraji to put in a word for him. The very next day I turned up at the *Business and Political Observer's* office on the 14th floor of the Vijaya Bank Buildings on Barakhamba Road, of course without an appointment. Mishraji had by that time become the Chairman of the Observer Group of newspapers. His PA told me that the Chairman was frightfully busy with a series of meetings planned for the day! I decided to try my luck. I told her to tell him that Sreekumaran from *Patriot* wanted to meet him on an urgent matter. She asked me to wait. I mentally prepared myself for a long wait. But Mishraji's response was almost immediate. Within ten minutes I was called in. I was meeting him after a long time. After enquiring about my welfare, Mishraji asked me what the urgency was. I told him about Sivadasan's plight. I distinctly remember Mishraji's response. "If Sivadasan is in trouble, then I must do something. Let me see. You meet me after three-four days." I left, reassured.

As luck would have it, Sivadasan managed to land a job in the meantime. When I informed Mishraji about the happy development he was relieved. "Good that he has secured a job. Otherwise, I was planning to absorb him in the OBP group," Mishraji said. The incident showed Mishraji's regard for '*Patriots*'.

Mishraji was blessed with the gift of the gab. He could talk most people into doing what he wanted them to do! The following incident is revealing of this facet of his magnetic personality.

The *Patriot-Link* Workers Union office-bearers were angry. Their grouse: Mishraji had promised to concede to their demands, but had not done anything for the last three months! They managed to get an appointment with him. And they wanted me to be part of the delegation. They said unless Mishraji agreed to their demands, they would be constrained to launch a strike. "This time, we are not going to listen to any excuses. We will give him a piece of our mind. It shall be strike if Mishraji fails to say yes", thundered one of the office-bearers. I accompanied them, apprehensive about the stormy meeting that was about to take place.

As soon as we took our seats, Mishraji gave us all a quick glance. He was in a relaxed mood. But he could sense the tension that crackled in the room and immediately took control of the situation. With a few well-chosen words, he put the Union office-bearers at ease. Then he proceeded to explain why he had failed to keep his promise. Such was the force of his logic that the angry Union members readily agreed with him. Forget giving Mishraji a piece of their mind, they were vigorously nodding their heads in agreement with Mishraji's explanation! Mishraji then told them about a branch office of *Patriot* he was planning to set up in Noida. *"Aur main Sinha sahib (Union President) ko is office ka in-charge bana doonga. Funds ka arrangement bhi main karoonga. Uske baad aap logon ko unionbaazi karne ki zaroorat nahi padegi,."* (And I will make Sinhasahab, [union president] in charge of the office). That was Mishraji at his persuasive best. When the meeting was over and the Union 'netas' came out of the room, I taunted them. "You people were saying that you would give Mishraji a piece of your mind and not listen to his explanations. *Kya hua?"* This was their reply. *"Are kya karein sahab, Mishraji ne ithna badiya bath kaha, uske baad humlog unka kaise virodh kar sakte hain?"*

No wonder the Vajayee government entrusted to him with the delicate mission of mending fences with the then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif through Track II diplomacy.

JOURNALISM

R.K. MISHRA

Sumit Chakravartty

R.K. Mishra, who recently breathed his last, was above all a well-known professional journalist who, while carrying out his professional assignments as the Rajasthan correspondent of Patriot daily before he became its Special Correspondent in New Delhi and subsequently the publication's editor, brought into focus the wide disparities in society and highlighted several progressive steps taken by the Union Government in the sixties and seventies of the last century. That was the time I was able to watch him at close quarters, having also worked in the same daily at Link House.

It was his activities as a journalist that laid the foundation for his subsequent forays into politics and corporate communication. As a journalist, he was moulded by the late Edattatta Narayanan, the editor of Patriot; he was also able to gather considerable professional experience from his association with the late Nikhil Chakravartty, the founder of Mainstream and its editor for long years.

One recalls with a sense of nostalgia one of his brilliant pieces in the sixties (that appeared in the Patriot's Sunday supplement) on the hardships endured by the resilient people of the Rajasthan desert, primarily due to the lack of water. This piece also portrayed the exquisite beauty of the state's landscape.

He wrote several articles on the issue of privy purses before Indira Gandhi decided to abolish the provision that only went to perpetuate the dominance of the princes in the polity. A few of these appeared in Mainstream. Some samples are worth presenting here.

"Before the departure of the British authority from India—which had deliberately kept the princely states at a distance from the rest of the country—Rajputana was regarded as the land of the Rajas and the Maharajas or of Marwari seths who had become symbols of capitalist exploitation of poor people and of natural resources from the tribal areas of NWFP to the hilly regions of Assam.

"The Marwari presence, either in the villages of the UP, Bihar and Bengal or in deep South, was taken as a warning of the arrival of the money-lender, profiteer, speculator and, in a few cases, of the industrial entrepreneur.

"Little was known in the rest of the country of the struggles and sacrifices of the illiterate, ignorant and isolated masses of the princely states of Rajputana against feudal oppression; and few had any idea about the enormity of the denial of civil liberties by the rulers and blood-sucking economic exploitation of the sturdy, hardworking cultivator by the jagirdars—who embodied not only the economic power that could strangle the peasant, but also the state authority to physically liquidate anyone who dared raise his head.

"It was in such a setting that the first peasant satyagraha was launched in Bijolia towards the end of World War I, long before the famous Bardoli struggle. The Bijolia agitation continued for six years and the devoted band of anti-feudal rebels, including a large number of women, suffered untold privations and won

their victory against the appropriation of three-fourths of their agricultural produce by the jagirdars. Roughly about the same time, the Bheels organised an armed uprising in the Aravali hills and the peasants in Shekhawati faced the feudal bullets with undaunted fearlessness. No Congress leader bothered to visit these centres of mass struggles: the only exception was Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first to visit the place after he became Congress President in 1929.

"But the barrier that separated the princely states of Rajputana from the rest of India had jammed the lines of communications between the 'riyasati' people and the enlightened public opinion in the rest of the country. That is why no voice of protest was raised when Sardar Patel insulted the glorious anti-feudal struggle of the masses in the princely states by declaring that the princes 'by their act of abnegation' had 'bought in perpetuity' the gratitude of 'their people'. From that day on, by deliberate design, steps were taken, one after another, to impart grandeur and a halo around the Maharajas ^ and the Rajas and their tribe.

"Similarly, in the name of industrialisation of 'backward Rajasthan' a policy of inviting 'our' industrialists from other states was pursued assiduously. The vast natural resources of the state were opened up scandalously, liberal concessions were offered, the fruits of the sacrifices of the people in the form of higher taxes etc. were placed at the disposal of the Marwari tycoons.

"If the Congress in Rajasthan today faces a deadly political challenge from the joint combination of Maharajas and Maharanis on the one hand and the big businessmen on the other, it would do well to recapitulate its various acts of omission and commission since the day Sardar Patel in his infamous speech placed the princes on a high pedestal of history and called upon the people to remain grateful to them 'in perpetuity'. If the people had been educated during the last twenty years that these princes were nothing but a new tribe of parasites enjoying fabulous unearned incomes, they would, by now, be an object of contempt and hatred.

"If this background were kept in view, one would not be surprised to find that of the sixteen general Lok Sabha constituencies in Rajasthan, the Congress faces a challenge from the Maharajas and Maharanis and their tribe in five constituencies and from the direct representatives of Big Business in six others." ("Rajasthan : Chieftains and Tycoons", Mainstream Republic Day Special, 1967)

"The demand for the abolition of privy purses of the former rulers of Indian States and other obscurantist privileges enjoyed by them has generated a heated controversy on the question of the inviolability of the rights enjoyed by these princes and princelings...

"The princely rights and privileges became part of the British scheme to create complications for the Indian people on the attainment of their freedom. Treaty obligations that the British imperial power had entered into with the former rulers were precisely intended to prevent the constitutional advancement of these states and the political progress of the country. British statesmen themselves made no secret of their stand—that the relations between the British imperial power and the states were determined not so much by the letter of the treaties as by usages and sufferance.

"In fact, the White Paper on Indian states published at the time of integration, records in great detail the anachronistic nature of British power towards the

princes. It was one of the principal contradictions of British rule in India that while in England and elsewhere feudalism died long ago, in India feudal rights continued to be guaranteed as a British obligation. When the British appeared in India, the Mughal Empire which had held the states together was disintegrating and with the establishment of the British as the dominant power in India a strange process overtook the states. The representatives of the powerful East India Company rescued a number of states from the wreckage that followed the collapse of the Mughal empire; some princes were lifted from chaos; others were confirmed in their possession whether acquired *legitimately* or *otherwise*; yet others were sent into oblivion.

"Sardar Patel himself said in one of his speeches in the Constituent Assembly about the arrangements with the princes that 'We agreed to this arrangement just as we agree to the partition of India. We accepted it because we had no option to act otherwise'. It is thus obvious that the payments were agreed to almost under duress.

"Those who try to paint a frightening picture of the problems if they had not been moved by their supposed Patriotism, insult the glorious struggle waged by the people of the Indian states against the feudal tyranny which was backed by British imperialism.

"The martyrdom of a hundred men and women in the village Nimochana in Alwar is recalled by the people of Indian states with the same reverence as Jallianwala Bagh is remembered in the rest of the country. The struggle of the peasants of Bijolia—this was the first glorious peasant rising in India (even before Bardoli)—is an epic of long resistance against feudal oppressions.

"The martyrdom of Sagarmal Gopa, burnt to death in the concentration camp at Jaisalmer, the courage with which Ramesh Swami of Bharatpur faced the fatal assaults upon him and the privations suffered by Balmukund Bissa of Jodhpur and Thakur Pratap Singh who died with smiles on their faces may not be known to those who conveniently forget the indomitable spirit which permeated the people of former princely states to throw away the feudal yoke and to establish democracy in an integrated independent India. Because the strength of the sufferings, sacrifices and the irrepressible urge of the people of the former princely states to join free and independent India as equal partners was not properly appreciated, the bureaucrats, succeeded in advising free India's first government to succumb to the princely blackmail.

"Since independence, the leaders of new India have not made any attempt to convey to our people the lessons of the valiant anti-feudal struggle. Instead, attempts have been made to invest the former rulers with a respectability which they could never command before. Attempts have been made to make people forget the bloody record of their tyranny and oppression.

"Because of the pampering of the princely order since independence the former rulers have succeeded in a large measure to invade even the political arena. The leaders of the ruling party are unable to gather courage to have faith in the masses and tremble at the prospect of losing power if the princes are arrayed against them. That is why a section of Congress leadership also talks of 'honouring the pledges' given to the former rulers.

"Whether the government can be courageous enough to rectify this distortion of

democracy in the country or not, it will do well not to advance the plea of 'rights' enjoyed by the princes under the British. The Congress leaders should at least desist from insulting the anti-feudal struggle of the masses by talking about the 'sacrifices' and 'Patriotism' of the princes. The facts of history show the princes did not enjoy any inviolable rights under British rule and therefore the talk of their having surrendered any such right is nothing but a myth."

("Myth of Princely Privilages", *Mainstream,/i>, August 19, 1967)*

'RK', as he was known to the journalist fraternity, played a noteworthy role alongside Patriot during the 1969 Congress split that saw the party's radical section (headed by Indira Gandhi) parting company with the conservative old guard (dubbed as Syndicate in those days). RK remained a staunch supporter of Indira Gandhi since those days and this continued during the Emergency as well. He wrote extensively on the 20-Point Programme of the Congress (with which he had, by then, formally associated himself and on whose backing he was elected to the Rajya Sabha).

After Edattata Narayanan's death he remained close to the Link House founder and distinguished freedom fighter, Aruna Asaf Ali, till the paper folded up due to financial constraints.

Thereafter RK traversed a wide arena and went into other pastures about which one had little knowledge. However, he did retain his journalistic acumen and occasionally used it in a variety of ways for wider benefit.

One shall always cherish his memory as a professional journalist who enjoyed wide contacts cutting across party barriers in both Rajasthan and the Indian Capital.

IS HE REALLY GONE?

Prem Prakash

As I write this piece, it has been several weeks since my friend R.K. Mishra left us all for some place from where they do not come back. Having been present to bid him a final good bye, I still keep wondering if he is really gone.

I came in touch with RK during the years he was the editor of *Patriot* in New Delhi. He liked what I was doing as a pioneer in the field of television. I would visit him often, ostensibly for a cup of tea in his office but more, in fact, to learn about the goings on in New Delhi—almost like researching on stories and facts.

New Delhi is a city not just of bureaucrats but of an army of scheming politicians. They all seem to come to life at night. Is there something in the soil of Delhi, the ancient land of Indraprastha, that it has always bred groups that conspire to outdo each other, all in the name of serving the great country? It is a city where multiple centres of power have flourished through the ages. If during the Moghul era it was the Emperor who was the target of such centres of power, in today's democratic India, it is the prime minister or the government.

I was astounded by how well RK knew them all. He could size up each of the individuals and what they were up to. Using my camera as an extension of a reporter's pen would often take me much closer to such groups. RK and I would then compare notes.

RK interest in the activities of such power centres was no doubt born out of his own journalistic and editorial needs. However, I could always notice his concern on the kind of effect that some of these people might have on the polity of the nation. He used that knowledge in his writings to ensure that the actors involved could correct themselves if the need arose.

I have had the privilege and honour of watching great editors like Kasturi Rangan, Frank Moraes, D.R. Mankekar and S. Mulgaonkar and even rubbed shoulders with the latter three when they decided to be personally in the field leading their team of reporters during the crucial visit of China's Prime Minister Chou En Lai in 1961. That was the high pinnacle at which India's journalists worked and gave of their best. As a young man, I was awe struck and had the great opportunity to observe and learn from these giants. My latter day visits to RK's office in *Patriot* were a similar effort at learning.

R.K. Mishra belonged to that uncompromising class of editors for whom India was supreme. Alas, there are very few of them around today. Crass commercialism that has become the primary objective of far too many media organisations has taken a very heavy toll on India's journalism. Advertising seems to dictate editorial policies. To RK, journalism was an end to serve Mother India.

As we came closer over the years I began to see the human and the family side of RK. Like all good people he was totally devoted to his family. Some years ago, his son-in law in Australia met with an accident. RK got the message late at night. Next morning both he and his wife Renuka were on the first flight to

Australia. RK was gone for several weeks, staying on until he was sure that his daughter and her family were secure.

He enjoyed the company of his friends and his wide circle did not just consist of politicians or journalists. His interest in matters of spirituality gave him a vast circle of friends and admirers among religious and spiritual leaders. To me, RK always looked to be wanting to go into the depths of India's great spiritual and religious heritage.

It was amazing to see how the giants of India's spiritual and religious world responded to him. The Shankracharya of Kanchi and other great religious leaders could often be seen at his place. He received them with all due protocol, high respect and reverence. He was constantly digging into India's great heritage and past.

I will always cherish some of the quiet discussions we had on what some have described as a great lost civilisation that perhaps once straddled our planet. A couple of American archaeologists digging into it have also ventured to say that it reflected what is today known as Hindu religion. Many Indians never tire of saying that Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life, a civilisation by itself. But have they worked to find out what happened to what was once a global civilisation? In his own way, RK was collating India's ancient heritage.

I have, for long, been researching the coming of the British to India just as many other races and people before them came. To my mind the British played a crucial role at a time when the country fell into darkness and chaos with the decline of the Moghul Empire, following Aurangzeb. RK and I would often discuss this topic as I informed him of my research at the India Office library in London. He would always tease me with the prefix "Lord" taking the liberty a friend is entitled to. I like to believe he enjoyed listening to me, even if he did not approve of my conclusions.

Any evening spent with RK and his lovely wife Renuka was not just an evening of good wine and food. It would be a stimulating evening of thoughtful brain storming. The topic invariably was India and whatever the issues of the moment. It would not restrict itself to politics and its players. One always finished the evening with a feeling of satisfaction at the way it had been spent. No silly gossip, just good rich conversation here.

I would often tell him that we were lucky that in the evening of our lives the young of India had made us proud by the manner in which they had managed to turn the country's economy around through the knowledge-based IT industry, that it was great to see India leading the world in the field. I would take a dig at him, knowing his earlier leanings towards the Left, for the "licence permit raj" that had reduced India's economy to what the world called the Hindu rate of growth.

Accepting the success of India's IT industry and the work put in by the youth of India, RK would not defend the licence permit raj. But he would aptly bring out the fact that the founding fathers had truly laid the foundation of India's self-reliant economy. All this constantly brought home his deep commitment to see India emerge as a world power.

He took leave of active journalism to establish the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), an organisation with the goal of producing policy papers on all the varied

issues confronting the nation. He was working to make ORF the premier think tank of India. He had laid solid foundations and one hopes that it flourishes and does not fade away, like so many good ventures do in this country.

Linked to India's security, his major concern that always worked on his mind was Indo-Pak relations. He had been silently working through back channels for bringing the two countries together. He would never let any opportunity go towards the end of good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

I have had a very high regard for the leader of Pakistan's MQM, Mr. Altaf Hussain. In my estimation, this is the one leader who knows what ails Pakistan. Once in Delhi, on very short notice I asked Altaf Bhai and his entourage to spend an evening with me at home. I naturally requested RK to join us. I had mentioned that it was just a social evening, a token return for Altaf Bhai's hospitality in London, and so both he and Renuka came.

Sure enough, before the evening was over, RK had made great friends with Altaf Hussain and some of his other colleagues. Altaf Hussain later addressed ORF and unravelled the complications of Pakistan's feudal society, complimenting India for the manner in which it had managed to get rid of feudal elements like jagirdari and zamindari soon after independence.

RK battled to the last against what was obviously terminal cancer. He was not the one to surrender. He continued to work hard and carry forward his tasks unhindered by the pain and debilitation. During my last interaction with him, I found that he had lost a lot of weight and looked so weak and yet was as full of spirit as ever. His concern as always was for India and which way her politics was going. I mentioned the kind of small people who were now occupying the centre-stage of Indian politics and undermining India's great institutions. His response was clear: small men would not matter and that we all need to keep our own objective clear. That good would triumph.

When I mentioned to RK that the assassination of Benazir Bhutto had virtually destroyed any hope off a solution to Indo Pak problems, he paused. I gave him the details of my last interaction in London with the slain leader. He was clear in his mind and said it only meant that some of us would have to work harder to make people understand the dangers that confront both India and Pakistan.

As one remembers each and every encounter and conversation with RK, I wonder how and with whom one would now carry forward the discussions. There is a deep void and I find myself looking deep into it.

Is he really gone?

SOME MEMORIES

Jayshree Sengupta

A friend, guide and my boss for a number of years, R.K.Mishra was always my well-wisher who never let me feel that he was my boss. I miss the advice and guidance he gave me on so many subjects. Most of all, I miss him when having to take a difficult decision. Full of humour, he waved all unnecessary worries away and gave me strength and confidence. He was an excellent raconteur and, when interacting informally with the ORF faculty, made us all laugh, putting every one at ease.

Above all, I admired his positive attitude to life. Unflappable and courageous, he would see the sunny side of any situation first, but then never failed in giving a balanced judgement about a person or a situation. For the many seminars we organized together at ORF, he would always insist that we invite people from all walks of life—a balanced milieu with diverse points of view—because, according to him, people had the right to hold their own different stand points. What he wanted was that the seminar participants should *think*, pure and simple—start a churning process in the mind and then cull out the cream, the essence that would be a relevant input for the formulation of the policy under consideration.

Earlier, working for him in the daily newspaper, *Observer of Business and Politics*, I witnessed how he infused our editorial meetings with enthusiasm and gave us very insightful ideas. When he was absent for some reason, he would call each of us separately and give us his ideas. He never interfered with our writing and gave us the freedom to write from any angle that we chose. I learnt a lot from his comments on my editorials. In 1998, I shifted from the *Observer* for six years to *The Hindustan Times*, where my experience of writing editorials under Mishraji's guidance proved to be of great advantage and helped shape my career as an edit writer.

He was always concerned about the plight of the poor and the underprivileged and was genuinely worried about the growing disparities in the standard of living and the rising inequalities of income, especially in urban India. Education, food security, price rise were subjects close to his heart and we organized many workshops and seminars around these subjects. For the seminar on food security, he even invited temple priests—a unique break from the norm—because he appreciated the fact that they were playing a very important role in daily feeding the hungry, the destitute and the homeless. He wanted the participation of real life practitioners—people who dirtied their hands doing real work—rather than the ponderings of dry academics which resulted in even drier debates. The result was that our seminars bore fruit in meaningful books with a purpose, based as they were on multifarious viewpoints. They remain his unique contribution. The Food For All seminar and another one on Centre—State relations were very well attended and well received.

Mishraji was meticulous about details and whatever we wrote he read and reread with meticulous care, adding neat comments for us to follow up. He had a tremendous capacity to grasp complex subjects and come out with expert comments. We were constantly amazed how he summed up complex seminar

deliberations in a lucid, compact manner without missing a single point.

A brave man, he never shied away from speaking out against any kind of injustice. No one, to my mind, understood Indian politics better than him. We were ever eager to hear his analysis of current issues and events, as he was gifted with a kind of prescience, a smell for the winds of change. He knew nearly all the important political players at the state and national level, having been a member of the Rajya Sabha himself for a number of years. He enjoyed personal equations with Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers and Central ministers, among others and they would all listen to him with undivided attention when he advised them.

Mr. Mishra was a visionary. He had the idea of an independent think tank and wanted the ORF to be a world class institution because there was, perhaps, no such institute of merit in India. He always wanted brain storming sessions on important policy matters involving the best minds of the country, so that new, viable ideas could be thrown up. Whenever we discussed the names of panelists or participants, he would make sure that people from the Left parties were included. He was very keen on the Left input on important policy issues.

When a problem arose on the national scene, he was among the first to grasp its implications. For example, when the rate of inflation was just beginning to rise in early 2007, he told me to organise a seminar on inflation for he apprehended that it would be a major issue in the near future. So I did organize a well attended seminar on inflation in April 2008, which highlighted many points that have become relevant today.

He had a great command over English and Hindi, and could succinctly and with precision express in a few sentences the essence of an argument. I learnt a lot from his exhaustive and detailed editing of manuscripts and papers that were compiled in to seminar volumes. He was a very good political commentator and his written comments on important subjects aroused a lot of interest. He always praised good writing and analysis and was always ready to give encouragement to the freshly recruited junior staff. He was a very just and fair person and gave everybody a chance to explain his or her actions. He forgave mistakes generously, though he could not suffer fools for long!

He helped the families of his employees generously and no one felt hesitant in approaching him with personal problems. He would listen patiently and always provide sound advice and, when necessary, even help monetarily.

Mr. Mishra helped many of his colleagues during his journalistic career when they were in dire straits and many have remained loyal to him. Even when he was seriously ill, he was always available and ready to give advice. We kept in touch regularly through e-mail and he answered every mail promptly.

He loved good vegetarian food and especially Bengali. I think he acquired this taste during his salad days spent in Bengal. He was immersed in religion and culture and welcomed discussions with scholars from different faiths. One of the focal points of his interest was Islamic culture and the ORF has been one of the few think tanks to highlight the culture of Iran. His own works are exemplary for his knowledge and deep understanding of the Hindu religion.

He encouraged me to write a book on the Indian economy that every intelligent

lay man could read and understand. I took two years to write the book and am thankful to him for prodding me to finish it. What I liked about him and miss greatly is his warmth and affection—a truly dependable friend. Whenever there was a need, one could go and talk to him on any subject and benefit from his experience and knowledge. Being very practical and down to earth, he never offered any improbable solutions or suggestions. I am glad I came to know him closely enough to gain so much from his highly perceptive thinking.

He appreciated my interest in art and painting and often showed me a work of art that he and Renukaji had bought. He had excellent taste in art and believed in moderation and balance and going for the classical more than the post Modern. In everything that he did, he showed the restraint and good taste of a connoiseur. He was harmony personified, relaxed and contented and believed in doing things in style and peacefully. In all, he was a born leader and inspired all of us with his dedicated, selfless hard work. Rarely does one find a person of his calibre and clarity of mind and with so much warmth and generosity.

GURU AND FRIEND

Saeed Naqvi

Fault me if you like but I will always remember him as a quintessential Brahmin, a deep Hindu, one whose appraisal of 'Hinduism' was way beyond the confines of religion, caste or community. He operated on a higher intellectual plane where he saw Islam, indeed all the religions of India, as strands in a tapestry, exquisite motifs on the broad civilizational canvas of Hinduism—Hinduism with a capital 'H', not the one current in contemporary public discourse. 'Secular' has been so prophaned that it would be too misleading a term to describe what I am grappling with. So, very early in our association, I began to address him as 'Panditji', partly in mock humour. He reciprocated by greeting me as 'Maulana', but always with a twinkle in his eye. For most people he was, simply RK, abbreviated from Rishi Kumar (Mishra).

He was a fun person, sometimes even a prankster with a delicious, mischievous sense of humour. He was in his element among politicians, who sought his advice (this included Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers, etc.) and political hangers-on, some of them depending on 'Panditji' to launch them in public life. And, not always perfect in his judgment, he launched many.

He had a talent for spotting foibles in politically ambitious men (and women) from which he often extracted his own variety of fun, not by lacing his comments with barbs or by hurtful satire but by letting the other person talk inordinately, exposing his own frailties as he continued his monologue. He had a knack of relapsing into an attentive silence, letting his eyes, bright as buttons, do all the talking. I have seen political aspirants reduced to patients on a shrink's couch under his alert gaze.

There were distinct responses from him at the end of these therapeutic sessions. If the would-be candidate blabbered excessively and reduced himself to a farce in his eager-beaver urge for power, Panditji would wait for him to depart, then spin around, clap his hands and double up with laughter.

If the aspirant presented a coherent, plausible case, he would close the door and turn to me, smiling. *'Kyon Maulana?'* The query meant: 'Does he have the aptitude for public life?'

Did he not find some of this a waste of time? He would bring his finger to his lips: 'Never', he admonished me. 'All of this is a source of knowledge about the evolving social and political culture, how it debases and energizes different people.'

He could argue both sides of a case with equal persuasiveness. His detractors, who were legion, advertised this as clinching evidence of his lack of conviction or commitment. A willingness to find fault in RK and transmit it on the gossip network was particularly rampant among his journalistic peers in his earlier days in Jaipur.

He was not a good looking man in the conventional sense, but men (and women)

seldom realized it when entranced by his charm. He could turn it on at will, keeping the company riveted with conversation ranging from small-talk to Vedic science. If conversation is the art of hearing and of being heard, he was adept at both.

It was in Jaipur that I first met him. I had run into a first class political situation soon upon arrival in Rajasthan as *The Statesman's* staff correspondent. Who should navigate me out of the jam? RK, of course.

Within six months of my being hired as a trainee reporter, I was promoted as the paper's correspondent to what the Resident Editor (the last of the British editors were still around) described as 'the princely state'. What was I supposed to do in the princely state? 'How were the princes adjusting to the new egalitarian order?' came the clarification.

Accompanied by my wife and daughter Saba, then our only child, I arrived in the capital of the 'princely state' in what remains in my mind as the most torrid summer. Armed with a letter of introduction to the Director of Public Relations, Rajendra Shankar Bhatt, I turned up at his office. He was a short man of cheerful disposition. 'But *The Statesman* already has a correspondent accredited to the state', he said, in a manner which indicated that my file had been closed.

Imagine my plight. Here I was, on the threshold of a burgeoning career, being told by the state authorities that my office in New Delhi had goofed and that the slot I was to occupy was already in the possession of an elderly journalist, about 80 years of age. He had been *The Statesman's* 'stringer' for decades. Just then RK walked in. 'Mishraji represents *Patriot,* a much smaller newspaper than *The Statesman*'. Bhatt laughed sarcastically. 'I suppose that is why *The Statesman* wishes to have two correspondents in Jaipur'. He put his head back and chuckled.

'Aisa naheen hai' (this is not the real story), RK said, correcting Bhatt. He intervened because he sympathized with a young new entrant, all of 23, being harassed by the establishment. The dominant emotion was one of empathy. He remembered the difficulties created in his path when he first arrived in Jaipur at about the same age a decade earlier.

Next morning he turned up at our temporary accommodation, not far from Mirza Ismail Road. He had understood the complications.

For a novice, uninitiated either in journalism (except for a six month stint as a feature writer) or in the Byzantine ways of newspaper offices, I was clearly unnerved. Should I call up the editor?

'Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you', RK said.

'Well, trouble is troubling me', I said, tossing at him his own words.

He said, *'Theek ho jaiga'* (It will be settled).

'How?'

He explained. It was a shaft of light, like a glistening knife through what appeared to me to be the thickest cloud I had ever seen. It was the first demonstration of a singular talent in RK, one which I was to admire over an association which lasted

forty five years. He had an extraordinary ability to cut through the most complex situations, unloosen the Gordian knot, and reach the heart of the matter. He could effortlessly simplify complex problems. All of this derived greatly from the gruelling intellectual drill he had been through during his study of the Vedas at the feet of his Guru. I shall revert to this later.

Soon after meeting me in Bhatt's office, he had visited *The Statesman's* elderly correspondent. Now, he was in possession of two versions of what in Jaipur's press corps was being circulated as a 'controversial appointment'. Understanding the gravity of the situation, RK had also spoken to his Patriot colleagues in New Delhi. His conclusions were:

The Editor's elevation of a professional novice had created a wave of resentment in *The Statesman's* editorial hierarchy. Nor was *The Statesman's* Jaipur correspondent willing to give in without a fight. He had support in the Delhi office where some colleagues had an interest in unsettling me. Embedded in the narrative was my first exposure to Brahmin-bonding—all explained to me by RK. The editor, like the proverbial wife, would be the last person to know about the problem my Jaipur appointment had run into. Which is just as well, RK said. Because if the editor did find out he would check the details from those below him, who were in cahoots with the Jaipur correspondent and could well paint an unflattering picture of an inexperienced appointee who had become 'controversial' soon upon arrival in the 'princely state'. Controversy was anathema in a newspaper run by the colonial system. It showed bad judgement.

'What do you suggest I do?' I asked.

'Ignore the controversy', he said. 'Just follow the editor's instructions'. He gave me that firm, know-all look. 'Remember, power resides with the editor and he knows nothing about this simulated controversy'.

'Politics', he said, 'is like an electrical circuit'. 'The circuit, in this, instance will be complete only when you react. In the absence of any reaction from you the politics sought to be generated will simply wither away'. 'Also, professional pique is an emotion with a short span', he said. 'Inform your office that you are looking for a house and settle down'. And settle down I did.

I have inflicted this narrative on you with a purpose: it set the tone for our equation over the years. In my eyes, it set him apart from the rest of the press fraternity I was to know and spend my days with in Jaipur.

Reasons for jealousies in the Jaipur press corps were fairly straightforward. *The Statesman's* preeminent position as *the* national daily was one. The other was that the most powerful newspaper in the country had sent a 23-year-old as its representative to Jaipur. Representatives of major national dailies were twice or three times my age. Panditji, at 31, was the youngest in that galaxy.

In the absence of a press club, the media rendezvous was a *paan* shop on Mirza Ismail Road, opposite the city's only cosmopolitan restaurant, Niros. Every evening a dozen or so scribes assembled at the stall, keeping Prem *paanwala* busy with their austere extravagance. Journalists attracted politicians. Therefore, every other day BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat came trudging along on his bicycle. Another round of *paans* for everyone. *'R.K. Mishra naheen aayey?'* (RK has not come today?) he asked. The response from two or three senior scribes

was a sort of smirk, a conspiratorial exchange of glances. *'Aap to jaantey hain woh kahan honge',* one of them said. (You know where to find him.)

The implication was that RK spent his mornings and evenings at the residence of the all-powerful Chief Minister, Mohanlal Sukhadia. It was then communicated in whispers that RK was in Sukhadia's 'pay'. Then came the unsolicited advice. I should steer clear of him, otherwise my newspaper's reputation would sink. But, I said, he had helped me by his counsel and emotional support without any apparent expectations.

Even though I found the *paan-chewing,* back-biting gang of scribes tiresome, their stories intrigued me. Yes, I found out, RK did spend his mornings with the Chief Minister. Indeed, it was common knowledge that Sukhadia's first cup of tea every morning was with him. Sukhadia's son-in-law began to ask of other journalists about 'Mishraji's hold' on Sukhadia. To avert a family rupture, the Chief Minister had to contrive an informal chat with selected journalists where the son-in-law in question was also present. In the course of an off-the-record conversation, Sukhadia slipped in a joke.

'Dekho yeh sab khabar le ke jaate hain; jo mitr subah aataey hain (RK) woh gyaan de ke jaatey hain (These friends come to me for news; the one who visits me in the morning tells me what news to make.) This confirmation, albeit as a joke, that RK was one of Sukhadia's principal advisers, created unspeakable heartburning in the press corps. The funny thing is that their responses mattered not a jot to him—an attitude, he told me later, that had been transmitted to him 'by our ancient texts'. The application of ancient knowledge to everyday life derived to a large extent from his early drill in Sanskritic studies.

Meanwhile, in my effort to follow *The Statesman's* mandate about the 'declining feudal order', I was ensnared by the charms of Maharani Gayatri Devi who, by the sheer light of her beauty, blinded one of any notions about her being on the decline—politically or otherwise. She was leader of the right-wing Swatantra Party founded by Rajagopalachari and Minoo Masani. Invitations to cocktails on the lawns of the Ram Bagh Palace had the same resonance in Jaipur, as access to the Buckingham Palace would have in London. This too created jealousies. The confluence of two journalistic streams, one close to the Chief Minister, the other to his princely political rival, made what a scribe described as 'roast *kebab* of our hearts'.

The austere, homespun, *paan*-chewing culture of Jaipur was worlds apart from the pomp of the Polo playing princes in their palaces. I straddled both the worlds, inclined somewhat more towards the latter, taking literally and by preference, the newspaper's mandate. Panditji in those days was in the grip of Marxist thought and had a sort of intellectual aversion for 'the last remains of feudal oppression'. But he was close to 'His Highness' Jhalawar, a member of Sukhadia's cabinet. Jhalawar sometimes drove to RK's home with bottles of 'Rose liquor' for which princely houses of Jhalawar and Udaipur were both famous. How does one square this with his passionate *'bhashans'* on the 'underclass'? Jhalawar sought RK's political advice because he had the reputation in Jaipur of being the Chief Minister's conscience keeper.

The contradictions in his intellectual make up were, paradoxically, inexplicable and yet quite straightforward: an important adviser to the Congress Chief Minister was an avid Communist! He even undertook to initiate me in the a, b, c's of Marxist

jargon. But he winked at Rose liquor supplied by Jhalawar. We waste our time if we scrutinize every action of his with solemn purpose. He was casual about things that didn't elicit gravitas. Jhalawar needed him more than he needed Jhalawar. He rather enjoyed Dryden's description as one aptly applicable to him.

'Faults he had some, for who from faults is free?'

The other strand in his personality was his knowledge of the Hindu texts and near mastery of the Bhagawad Gita, something he never wore on his sleeve. This side of him surfaced over our occasional 'drinking' evenings which had picked up in frequency—twice a week. This greatly endeared him to me because my own childhood of faded feudalism had been reared in Saraswati's shadow, poetry and literature in which he too was steeped.

Other scribes in the city had by now placed on the gossip networks the 'indisputable' fact that I was in 'Gayatri Devi's pay'. This cemented my bond with RK further. We put it down to envy because of the exclusive access we had to diametrically opposite power centres.

But what truly brought us together was the considerable cultural commerce that RK coaxed out of our relationship. *'Maulana, woh Nazir ka kya suna rahey they aap?'* (What was that poem of Nazir Abarabadi on Lord Krishna's childhood.) Goga Merhi, the shrine in Ganganagar equally revered by Hindus and Muslims; the book on Indian aesthetics by Ibrahim Adil Shah, the King of Bijapur, which begins with

Saraswati Vandana; the finest poetry in Sanskrit on Lord Rama written by Abdul Rahim Khan-e-khana; Ghalib's description of Varanasi as the 'Kaaba' of Hindustan; the Sufi-Bhakti compact. All of this kept him riveted.

'Maulana, Kausar aur Ganga ke kinaron ko mila dena hai'. (We must create a confluence of the holy Ganga and Kauser, the river of paradise.)

One fact he was unshakably convinced of. The distortions in Hindu-Muslim relations were a post-1857 phenomenon. That Hindus and Muslims fought jointly unnerved the imperial authority, leading to a regular policy of divide and rule. 'Why has everyone forgotten that Dara Shikoh had the Upanishads translated into Persian?'

This was the plane on which our friendship was structured.

In his social habits he was private. Our equation was our bilateral matter and I seldom knew where he spent most of his evenings. It was years after I had left Jaipur that the truth about his mysterious evenings dawned on me. They were spent at his Guru's ashram. A journalist who came through the classical guru-shishya *parampara*! One rubs one's eyes with wonder. RK did come through this centuries old drill.

From Dera Ismail Khan in NWFP, his parents, Bhardwaj Brahmins, moved to Jhang in Punjab and zigzagged their way to Calcutta where most of his early education took place. He always quoted something that was a Hindi version of Mark Twain's dictum. 'My education was continuous since birth except for a short break at school!' Part of his formal education consisted of lessons in Sanskrit, which RK remembered for its system of punishment and reward. The reward was

'mishri' in a blob of pure *ghee*. Punishment was, well, certainly no mishri and ghee.

In Calcutta, he was spotted by Moolchand Agarwal, proprietor of *Vishwamitraa*, a Hindi daily. At about the same time, Sukhadia, who knew Agarwal, was keen to start a newspaper for the Congress party in Jaipur.

RK first came to Jaipur in 1954 as correspondent of *Vishwamitra* and met Sukhadia. His intuitive understanding of the political class came instantly into play. *'Aap Mukhya Mantri ka shapat lene ka man bana leejiye; main Navyug kal nikal doonga.*' (You prepare yourself to become chief minister; I will immediately bring out *Navyug*). With future Rajasthan Chief Minister Hardeo Joshi as Managing Editor, *Navyug* was launched. At 27, RK became its first editor.

The *Navyug* soon became a successful Hindi daily. On 6 November 1954, Sukhadia became one of the country's youngest Chief Ministers. The jealousy RK's role inspired in the press circles set Jaipur ablaze.

The envy he inspired by his meteoric rise when he was only in his early 20s enabled him to empathize with me when my arrival in Jaipur likewise was greeted with professional hostility. He understood instantly the malicious rumours floated by the fraternity that I was in 'Gayatri Devi's pay'. He turned the tables on our media 'adversaries'. As in an intellectual variation of Japanese martial arts, RK exploited the opposing force to his advantage. 'Malicious gossip which links you to someone in authority eventually reaches the principal', he said. 'This puts pressure on the principals to accord you protection because they know the truth about your innocence'.

But he found such situations boring and petty. He would rather spend his time reading, discussing philosophy or general *gup-shup* with the more intelligent among the political class. His yen for learning brought him into contact with Radha Ballabhji, not only a famous lawyer and leader of the Communist Party but also a respected scholar of the Bhagawad Gita.

Radha Ballabh's eccentricities exceeded even RK's. 'The time for serious conversation is after 2.00 am', he declared. To avoid disturbing families of the Gita enthusiasts, it was necessary to meet at some neutral venue. With his penchant for the novel, RK suggested 'the bench at the Jaipur railway station.'

He had a ramshackle Morris Minor, a leftover from his *Navyug* days. (Jealousies had led to quarrels with Joshi, and *Navyug* had to be closed.) With his wicked sense of humour, Panditji had named the car Magni Bai, a common name for a Rajasthan songstress. Five friends with RK at the steering wheel drove to the railway station every morning past 2.00 am, where Radha Ballabh's Gita discourses lasted till 5.00 am.

A hearty breakfast of *jalebis, poori* and *kachauris* at a choice halwai shop rounded off the Gita lessons.

'But even in his quest of good *halwais*, Mishraji was inventive', recalls Veer Saxena, noted Hindi poet and one of the participants at the Gita discourse at Jaipur railway station. 'One day, through a complicated maze of lanes and by lanes, he led us to a sweet shop with *'Unt-shunt halwai'* inscribed on the board. 'The fellow had items like salted *jalebis* and sweet *kachauris*—stuff of creative

madness!' And trust RK to locate the shop!

The drive to the railway station was convenient in summer, but the winter chill in Jaipur can get to the bone. To fight the cold, the gang of five decided to acquire a woolen jacket each. A woollen jacket each for five individuals was an expensive proposition. The gang fell into deep thought. 'The chill factor operates only during the drive to the railway station', RK said ponderously. 'Inside the station, pullovers suffice'.

'What is the point?' the remaining four asked in unison.

'Instead of ordering five jackets, why don't we have one tailored for Magni Bai?' The proposition won unanimous support. Magni Bai thus became history's only car wearing a jacket, a sort of fat tea cosy, heavily stuffed with cotton. The contraption kept out the chill during drives to the railway in the wee hours of the morning.

If Gita lessons had such light moments attending them, RK's study of the Vedas involved much greater rigour.

One of the country's leading authorities on the Vedas, Pandit Motilal Shastri, had built his Manavashram at Tonk Road, on the outskirts of Jaipur.

RK's association with Pandit Motilal Shastri began by accident. One day, browsing through a collection of Shastriji's lectures in a friend's study, RK scribbled some notes on the margins of the document.

Shastriji, it transpires, occasionally visited the friend in whose study RK had seen a copy of his lectures. One day Shastriji dropped in again and was intrigued by the 'insightful' notes on the margins. The friend told him about RK. That is where matters rested for months.

One evening, with the suddenness of revelation, Pandit Motilal Shastri, in handsome headgear, a neatly tiedpugree, turned up at RK's house. He said he had read what RK had written about his lectures on the margins of the document and then asked him what he did for a living. RK said he was a journalist.

Shastriji fixed RK in his gaze and asked: *'Kabhigadhe ko dhak khatey dekha hai?'* (Have you ever seen an ass eating raisins?)

RK mulled over Shastriji's cryptic comment. What did he mean? Clarity came upon reflection. What Shastriji meant was this: RK was wasting his intellect on journalism. He had grasped the essence of Shastrji's thought in one, casual reading in a friends' study. His mind was clearly meant for a higher intellectual pursuit than mere journalism. His palate was made for a diet of raisins, not grass, which suffices for donkeys.

This is how RK started appearing at 'Guruji's' lectures at Manavashram.

At the end of one such conclave, Shastriji asked his regular *'shishyas'* (students) to give him a gist of his lecture. Even though RK was not asked, he found the lecture so absorbing that he wrote a 20 page article in English, as a sort of background paper for a study he was privately planning to undertake.

When Shastriji read RK's article based on his lecture, he asked RK to visit him, if possible with a translation in Hindi. This led to an extraordinary association. Shastriji gave RK an open invitation: 'Visit the ashram whenever you have the time'.

In this fashion began a Guru-shishya equation that was to last until Shastriji death in 1960 at a relatively young age of 51. RK was 28. Every evening, RK would visit the ashram, listen to Shastriji speak on a subject and take notes. Next day, in Shastriji's presence, he would read out in English his version of the talk.

'Motilal Shastri could not read English', RK told me. 'But he understood it'.

'One day he called me to his writing room'. This was the sanctum sanctorum of one of the most amazing structures this writer has ever seen.

One courtyard opened onto another. The main living room was at the edge of a well. It was enclosed by verandahs which enveloped the room, insulating it from heat and cold. The adjacent room was Shastriji's library, racks lined with about 10,000 books, many of them rare manuscripts. Next was a large family room, with a narrow private study where he did most of his writing. From his writing table he could see the wall of the living room abutting the well. No *shishya* of Shastriji's had access beyond the first drawing room.

In the exclusive circle of Vedic scholars, Motilal Shastri's reputation had spread across India. Important conclaves of Vedic scholars, mostly in Varanasi or Kolkata, were seldom held without a major paper presented by Shastriji.

President Rajendra Prasad, an avid follower of Shastriji, had invited him to the Rashtrapati Bhavan as state guest for several days.

When he travelled out of Jaipur, Shastriji would stay with his other devotees. On a visit to Mumbai as guest of a major industrialist, Shastriji asked RK to accompany him. The industrialist was impressed with the trust Shastriji reposed in RK. After breakfast one morning, he asked RK to accompany him to his office for a 'confidential' chat. He offered RK employment on terms far in excess of anything RK had dreamt.

RK's response was based on logic, typical of his ability to meet a complex situation with razor-sharp clarity.

'You have offered me this job because of my closeness to Shastriji, whom you respect greatly', he said. 'Why would I therefore give up my primary asset, namely my proximity to Guruji?'

Considerable time elapsed. One day Shastriji said, 'I want you to live in the ashram'. Trust begot more trust.

The mandate given to RK was quite extraordinary: 'These lectures will form the basis of books you will write to propagate Vedic thought to the English reading audience. You will begin this work 30 years from now.' The words resonated like some oracle from antiquity.

Shastriji died in 1960. RK started writing *Before the Beginning and After the End* in 1990, abiding exactly by Guruji's instructions.

In ancient tradition, the progeny did not inherit the Guru's mantle or the ashram. It was left in the care of his prime *'shishya'*, or pupil, in this case RK. Imagine the storm it raised among the sons of Pandit Motilal Shastri!

It says something of us as a people, with our tipping of the scales in favour of 'Lakshmi' as opposed to 'Saraswati' and the relentless surge of materialism, that the 'inheritor' of one of the rarest schools of ancient Indian thought eventually sought and obtained recognition as a journalist, a one-man- think-tank: he advised Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi, P.V Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari Vajpayee and eventually, the country's leading industrialist, Dhirubhai Ambani. But, it must be added in parenthesis, that his intellectual commitment to Guruji transcended all his other interests, including the the twists and turns of his marathon career.

It was not a four figure salary for RK as *Patriot's* correspondent in Jaipur. But consistent with The *Patriot's* political line, RK kept in touch with all the Communists. Indeed, he 'advised' H.K. Vyas quite as diligently as he did Chief Minister Sukhadia, two extremities of the political spectrum.

Proximity to Sukhadia brought him close to the Congress leadership, including Indira Gandhi. Closeness to Vyas placed him in the focus of the *Link* group, Krishna Menon, Dr. Baliga and Aruna Asif Ali.

Naturally, when the Kumaramangalam thesis of Left and Democratic Unity was enunciated after Indira Gandhi split the Congress in 1969, RK was the man of the moment, a bridge between the Leftist vision and Congress pragmatism. He took up his perch as *Patriot's* editor to forge that very Left-Democratic unity. Since he had inherited the job from a giant of a Leftist intellectual, Edattatta Narayanan, the new Editor, RK, had to continuously measure up to the standards set by Narayanan. And measure up he did. Indeed, in ancient Brahminical tradition, he became the unofficial Raj Purohit to Indira Gandhi on the one hand and Aruna Asaf Ali on the other.

Information begets information. RK's access to the highest echelons of power enabled him to obtain information at all levels of the establishment and beyond— the diplomatic community, opposition parties, world statesmen. As a result, his political columns were the most well-informed. Only Nikhil Chakravartty of *Mainstream* could claim to have RK's level of contacts across the full gamut of the Indian establishment. But even Nikhil*da*'s range did not extend to business and industry.

Both Nikhil *Da* and RK were intellectuals who had been Communists in an earlier incarnation. It was RK's belief that the respectability accorded to the Left was a residual hold over from Nehruvian days.

Rajiv Gandhi's principal secretary, Gopi Arora, famously described as the poor man's PN. Haksar, told me in so many words: 'RK is right: to be acceptable in India, the intellectual has to be Left of Centre'.

This was the state of affairs until the '90s dawned. The collapse of the Soviet Union weakened the Left in India. P. V. Narasimha Rao invited Dr. Manmohan Singh to design economic policies that would keep Indian gold from being mortgaged. The Left was in decline. The smell of capitalism was in the air.

RK had not quite written the requiem for the Left, but had sensed major shifts in international affairs ever since Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1984, the year in which Indira Gandhi was assassinated. Perestroika and glasnost (restructuring and transparency) signalled a new world order that would not leave India untouched, he said.

'If Gorbachev can keep perestroika and glasnost on a tight leash, we shall have a more just, multipolar world order', RK predicted in his *Patriot* office. 'But he could lose control; in which case we shall live through a unipolar nightmare'. He proved right.

The growing friendship between Rajiv Gandhi and Gorbachev invited a backlash, external and internal, somewhat similar to the backlash that Indira Gandhi's splitting of the Congress in 1969 had provoked.

The Bihar movement in 1974 forcing Indira Gandhi to declare an Emergency in 1975; her assassination in 1984; V.P Singh as knight in shining armour riding a crest on Bofors; the destabilization and ultimate dethronement of Rajiv Gandhi: RK saw all these as part of an epic battle between the Left and the Right.

It was in this framework that RK saw the *Indian Express* versus Dhirubhai Ambani standoff. There was another dimension to the Dhirubhai-Ramnath Goenka tussle. Goenka had thrown his lot behind what RK called the 'Public School' elite. This is the elite that supported Jinnah's grandson, Nusli Wadia of Bombay Dyeing. Ambani, in RK's framework, was the underdog, the Johnny-come-lately, who threatened entrenched industrialists.

RK's sympathies were with the underdog, as we shall see.

Since RK was in the inner group of Indira Gandhi's advisers, he too was occasionally roped in to settle intra-party scores. One day Deb Kant Barua, Congress President during the Emergency, handed him a slip of paper in great secrecy. The paper had names of the three senior Congress leaders. 'The Prime Minister wants you to keep an eye on them': Barua whispered. 'They are supposed to be close to the Americans'.

RK rather enjoyed this bit of sleuthing. One morning, however, he got up with a start. Across the first four columns of the *Times of India* were the names of three new ministers who had been inducted into the Union Cabinet in an unscheduled cabinet reshuffle.

The three were exactly the ones Barua had furtively handed to RK in that slip of paper.

RK was angry. Barua himself did not know what had happened. How did the three 'suspects' get into the cabinet?

When Indiraji learnt of RK's annoyance and Baruaji's puzzlement, she called them one day. She had, through her own parallel 'network' found out that the three were not just 'suspects', but confirmed operators in the American orbit. 'The best way to control senior leaders is to have them under surveillance in the cabinet system', Indira Gandhi said. RK told this story with great admiration for Indira Gandhi's sagacity.

The other Indira Gandhi story was related to me by Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna.

'A passing remark by me to all these journalists results in banner headlines and editorials', Indira Gandhi once told RK. 'You spend so much time with me and I never see a story by you in your newspaper.' 'Most journalists wish to influence their readers' RK quipped. 'I try to influence you'. The Prime Minister was amused.

RK's light-hearted comment actually carried the seed of an essential truth about his journalism. He was not a liberal, middle-of-the-road journalist, balancing the story between competing points of view. Nor was he a stylist like Sri Mulgaonkar and Niranjan Majumdar.

One cannot compare apples and oranges, but he rather rejoiced in the Walter Lippman image: write the President's speech and proceed to praise it in his next column.

Well, this is roughly what RK did when he helped draft Indira Gandhi's 21 point programme. Indeed, from *Navyug* to *Patriot* and onto Ambani's *Observer of Business and Politics*—RK remained the deep establishment 'insider' with a journalist's ability to influence it from the 'outside' as well.

At the outset, his proximity to Dhirubhai Ambani invited brickbats because the equation, forged at Dhirubhai's behest, pitted both of them against the might of the entire Indian establishment, spearheaded by Ramnath Goenka. According to RK, all of this was part of the global upheaval that followed the fall of one of the columns of the bipolar world.

When the '90s dawned, the Soviet Union had collapsed; non-alignment had apparently outlived its relevance. In the absence of external support, the Left agenda internally would undergo revision; allies would have to be sought within the emerging corporate world.

RK had difficulty sympathizing with the point of view of the majority in the Indian establishment which, in that contest, favoured Nusli Wadia against Dhirubhai.

'These are Macaulay's children, the Anglicised Malabar Hill elite resisting a new entrant to the corporate club'.

Goenka's missile launcher was Rashriya Swayamsevak Sangh's S. Gurumurthy, writing a spate of articles demonizing Dhirubhai. RK retaliated in *Patriot*.

This is how the founder of Reliance Industries became RK's friend. Like all powerful people in politics or business who came close to him, Dhirubhai too developed familiar symptoms of what can be described as the 'RK dependency syndrome'.

RK never founded great newspapers—*Navyug, Patriot,* or Dhirubhai's *Observer of Business and Politics*. But each newspaper he was associated with played a crucial role in its own time. (It was wisdom distilled from his experience as a newspaper editor that inspired him to build a think tank, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), as a national asset with intellectual depth.)

The *Observer* created Hindi editors like Udayan Sharma and Rajiv Shukla. It resurrected strategic thinkers like K. Subrahmanyam, who had retired as Director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis. He was given a regular editorial job in the *Observer*. But there was another, more important role the *Observer* played in insulating Dhirubhai from the gathering media assault. *Observer* raised journalists' salaries to such heights that aspiring reporters toned down their criticism of Dhirubhai.

Peel by peel, RK was yet to reveal his deep inner core. I was quite astonished when, one day, he arranged for Ambani's private aircraft to fly in the Shankaracharya of Kanchi to meet some Muslim leaders. He was keen for a settlement on the Babri Masjid tangle. This was a typical, audacious RK move. Believe it or not, the Shankaracharya often stayed with RK. This was consistent with the principle RK enunciated to me. 'Ignore middlemen', he said. 'Always deal with the man at the top'—in this case, the Shankaracharya. RK was pained at the Shankaracharya's subsequent misdemeanours at Kanchi. For him, it was like another fall of Man. One would need access to confidential intelligence documents to detail key elements in his several Indo-Pak, New Delhi- Srinagar secret back-channel efforts, meeting his counterparts in far-flung places like Singapore, Dubai or London.

Because of his habitual proximity to power, as I have said earlier, RK was despised and admired by his peers in equal measure. However, I would be remiss in not acknowledging my gratitude to him for having nudged me into political writing.

Remember, *The Statesman* had sent me to Jaipur to record the princes in decline. RK did not interfere with my professional trajectory for the first six months.

One day he said: *'Maulana, Rajware khatam ho gaey; raajniti samjhiye'*. (Princes are no more. Understand grassroot politics).

He got into my Hillman and navigated me to the Chief Minister's bungalow. When we left Sukhadia's house after about two hours, I turned to him in surprise.

'Panditji, my training says that journalists ask questions which politicians answer', I was truly, truly bewildered. 'But here you were delivering the lecture and Sukhadia was listening'.

'Maulana, dekhte jaaiye.' (keep watching). My naivete, it would seem, amused him.

He then directed me to an open terrace in the house of Jat leader Kumbharam Arya, Sukhadia's political enemy. Again a repeat of what I had seen at Sukhadia's house. Here was Panditji, slicing the air with both his hands in a gesture characteristic of him. The Jat leader listened to his lecture with rapt attention. Panditji's appraisal of the political scene here was exactly the opposite of what he had told Sukhadia!

After a brief halt at Communist leader H.K. Vyas' office, Panditji came to our house for a 'shot' of Kesar Kasturi.

'What was this demonstration of virtuosity in aid of?' I asked. In his company I

often felt like Watson, Sherlock Holmes' sidekick.

'Maulana, chup chaap sochiye; phir ek political column likhiye' he said. 'Raja Rani bhool jaaiye'. (Think in silence and then write a political column; forget about the princes and the princesses)

Two days later, on the editorial page of The Statesman appeared the first political column of my journalistic career. I owed it entirely to RK.

After Jaipur, our careers moved along different paths but whenever we met we were able to connect at the same level of affection and mutual professional respect we had developed for each other.

The last project he was keen to embark on was an international media network under the auspices of the ORF. He thought it was disgraceful that we should be passive recipients of images beamed by CNN and BBC from all corners of the globe, including Kabul and Colombo. For us to be at the world's high table we, the world's largest democracy, 'would have to develop the means to see the world with our own eyes'.

I accompanied him to the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. We were keen to have his views. The project would be implemented by ORF. The project was left incomplete because just then he fell ill—fatally, as it turned out.

But even in his last days when he was reduced to a shadow of himself, his basic concern was his commitment to the Guru of Manavashram, who taught him to contemplate life on a plane much higher than Prime Ministers and the country's greatest industrialist whom he advised with his exceptional insights and erudition. The corridors of his mind had innumerable lanes but the traffic of ideas never crossed the yellow lines, allowing the good and the bad, the deep and the cunning, equal play, but all under the overarching canopy of his Guru's ideas which his wife, Renuka and his trusted secretary, Jayan, are sifting from boxes upon boxes of handwritten notes on paper which is turning yellow with age.

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICS

PASSION FOR IDEAS

Danial Sneider

The obituaries published upon the death of my old friend, R.K. Mishra, describe him as a veteran journalist. it is a description that is accurate but incomplete. RK indeed began his professional life as a journalist, beginning as a reporter in Calcutta in the early days of free india. He devoted decades to that profession, one that both of us shared and loved. He always retained the sensibility of a journalist—a curiosity about the world, an analytic approach that was not bound by ideology, and the energy of a reporter chasing a good story.

But to call RK simply a journalist is to miss the essence of his life—a gift for reinvention, driven by a passion for ideas and a profound sense of *Patriot*ism. Over the course of his life, RK was many things, sometimes at the same time—a politician, a social activist, a philosopher, a diplomat, a policymaker, an entrepreneur, and not least, a father and a husband. He was restless, never content to remain in one place, always active and ready to try something new.

i first met RK a little more than three decades ago, as a young american journalist visiting india. Those were interesting times in the country—the imposition of the state of emergency had led to the Congress party losing power for the first time since independence. The post-independence vision of nehruite socialism and an economy based on import substitution was being challenged and questioned by many indians. The world was itself in the midst of change—the Cold War battlefield had shifted increasingly from europe to the Third World. For some, the north-South conflict had replaced the Cold War struggle between east and West. india was in the middle of all those pulls and tugs on its identity and its role in the world.

RK, when i first met him, was deeply immersed in all those events. AS the editor-in-Chief of *Patriot* and the director of the group's other publications, including *Link* magazine, he was very much a part of the debates going on about india's future direction. But as usual, RK had more than one identity—he was also at that time a member of the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. i found those dual roles jarring at the time—by the conventions of American journalism, such a double identity would have been unthinkable. But somehow he pulled it off quite seamlessly.

R.K. Mishra was part of a group of progressive journalists and others who were close advisors to indira Gandhi and the Congress party, helping her plot a path out of the political wilderness. along with RK, i came to know other journalists, like Ganesh Shukla and Girish Mathur of New Wave, who were part of this circle. They were veterans of the indian left and in some cases, of the freedom struggle, committed to nehru's vision of a secular india, progressive in their politics but pragmatic in their approach. They could move easily from global politics to a discussion of india's ancient past and its lessons for the present.

My education in indian history, politics and life came largely at their hands. at their encouragement, i read nehru's masterful *Discovery of India and Glimpses of World History*, his remarkable set of prison letters to his daughter. i dipped into the Upanishads, though i confess it remains a daunting read. Those volumes still

occupy the shelves of my home library.

Over dinner at their home, RK and his wife Renuka generously offered the insights gained over many decades, often generating lively debate. Renuka's passionate activism on behalf of the rural poor and later in Kashmir, symbolized the partnership that was at the core of their marriage. it was a mutual devotion that remains an inspiration for me, reflecting RK's deep respect for indian women.

AS our relationship deepened, RK revealed another, more hidden side to his identity—a long interest in indian philosophy, a devotion to the study of the Vedas and Upanishads that sometimes took him off for days and weeks at a time to an ashram. Later he penned scholarly books on these subjects, trying to rediscover the wisdom of india's unique ancient writings.

RK was not only engaged with india but also the world beyond. He travelled widely, even in those days. We spent some time together in the summer of 1979, first covering the non-Aligned Summit meeting in Havana, Cuba, and then travelling to new York. Like many indians of his generation, RK had a mistrust of the United States shaped by the Cold War era and the tensions that plagued our relationship for so many decades. But his journalistic curiosity generally prevailed —he wanted to understand the US rather than simply condemn its policies.

RK never failed to find the teachable moment and time for talk. Like many indians of his generation, he was profoundly convinced that dialogue would lead to a meeting of the minds. He did not care whether he was speaking to young or old, rich or poor, indian or American or Russian. He believed in the universality of ideas and the interconnectedness of the human kind.

I had arrived in Delhi with some understanding of America's uneasy relationship with india. i grew up as the son of an American diplomat, including three years as a teenager in Karachi, Pakistan during the days of Ayub Khan's regime. i had been influenced as well by the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement that swept American campuses in the late 1960s. But even i was shocked at how many Americans viewed india in those days through the prism of the Cold War, as a virtual ally of the Soviet Union. There was very little effort to understand the very practical interests that drove india's ties to the Soviet Union. indians tended to mirror that perception, falling back on cliched imagery of the United States as a crude and bumbling, if not hostile, superpower.

Many Americans saw india simply as an impoverished nation, governed by an unwieldy democracy with its own peculiar style. indians, on the other hand, were fiercely proud of their struggle for freedom from colonial rule and of their path of non-alignment between the two blocs, a path Americans never fundamentally accepted as legitimate. The Bangladesh

war in 1971, which saw the United States cynically align itself against that nation's freedom for Cold War ends, led to an even deeper gap between india and the United States. Whatever her flaws, indira Gandhi, following in the footsteps of her father, represented this desire for independence. RK understood this sense of indian pride but he also strongly believed that india had to be a player on the stage of world affairs.

The mistrust between Americans and indians sometimes took on a very personal animus. When they gathered together at Embassy briefings or over drinks,

American reporters made little secret of their hatred for Mrs. Gandhi or their irritation at the "arrogance" of indians. They made little effort to do what good journalists should—always try to put oneself in the place of the other person to understand what moves and motivates their actions.

The end of the Cold War served to liberate both indians and Americans from this prison of mutual misperception. i had been a correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor in Tokyo in the second half of the 1980s and from there went to Moscow as the paper's bureau chief, arriving in the spring of 1990. i saw RK on a visit to india in the winter before my move to the Soviet Union. indian policymakers and business had begun to take the first steps toward liberalizing its economy, stepping out beyond the walls of protection, eager to grab a share of the high technology revolution that had begun to sweep the world. RK, typically, saw the change afoot and embraced it.

I recall a visit by RK to Moscow during my four-year assignment there. Like many others who had known the Soviet Union during earlier years, he was stunned by the decay in that society and the rapid collapse of a system that had seemed so enduring. RK was already thinking about india, and how the end of the Cold War required the country to rethink not only its foreign but also its domestic policies. He had left *Patriot* by then to head the Observer Group of Publications as its Chairman and Editor-in-Chief. That led to yet another reinvention—and an enduring legacy—as the head of india's most successful non-profit policy research institution, the Observer Research Foundation.

I did not reconnect with RK, though we communicated from a distance, until later that decade, when he came to visit us in California, where i had moved in the mid-1990s. He was building partnerships for ORF with American research institutions, looking for new models of how to shape policy but also for Americans eager to engage a vibrant india. He forged important ties to key institutions such as the Brookings institution, and he generated a windstorm of ideas for joint research projects on everything from security to energy development.

The exchange of visits by indian and American leaders at the end of the decade marked a turning point in their relationship.

RK, as always, was active behind the scenes in making it happen. During the Clinton and Bush administrations, RK was a trusted interlocutor as well with Americans who were promoting the deepening of the indo-US partnership. They were impressed by his *Patriot*ism and his ability to move between the different ends of the indian political spectrum, trusted for his discretion and intelligence. it led him, as others know much better than i do, to play a key role behind the scenes with Pakistan and on other important missions.

In Silicon Valley, where i had settled down, the visible contributions of overseas indians to the information Technology revolution offered very tangible evidence of the transformation of our mutual perceptions. The iT revolution permanently transformed the image of india in the American mind—the software engineer and the call center replaced the farmer and the bullock cart. i visited india again, after an absence of more than a decade, in 2003, after taking up a new role as syndicated foreign affairs columnist, based at the *San Jose Mercury News*, the newspaper of Silicon Valley. i spent many hours again with RK and Renuka, relearning about india and marvelling at the pace of change that animated the country. i recall, for example, a dinner discussion about highway building in india.

Renuka, as always, was quick to remind me of the challenges—of rural poverty and uneven development—that remained in place despite the evidence of change.

I had the opportunity to visit the impressive headquarters of ORF in Delhi, to lecture there on US foreign policy and to meet some of the young researchers being gathered under its auspices. And as i moved to gradually make my own transition out of journalism into academic research and policy work, RK and i worked closely together in a joint task force on india-US Relations at the ORF and the Pacific Council on international Policy, a West Coast affiliate of the Council on Foreign Relations. We both believed strongly that the key to the burgeoning partnership between our two countries was not simply geopolitics, certainly not the mistaken belief of some American strategists that india could be drawn into an anti- China containment approach or that differences over Pakistan and other issues could be easily ignored. Rather, we saw the forces of economic and cultural globalization, driven by our shared iT revolution, as the real drivers of a new "voyage of rediscovery." The report we issued in 2005 made these points strongly and in detail and was well received in both Delhi and Washington.

At that point i moved over to Stanford University's Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, a multi-disciplinary academic research institution dedicated to current issues in the region and US policy in the area. RK and i talked about creating a partnership between ORF and Shorenstein APARC. We successfully held a joint conference examining the prospects for regionalism in South Asia in the summer of 2008, and began discussions of more joint work ahead.

Sadly for all of us, RK was unable to win a final battle against the disease that attacked him so unfairly at the peak of his achievements. Yet it was a life fully lived, one that left a rich legacy, particularly for those of us beyond india's borders who experienced RK as a true Ambassador of his nation. His selfless *Patriot*ism and global citizenship remain an inspiration. I, for one, will miss him deeply.

IN MEMORIAM

Ashley Tellis

In so many ways, this is a difficult piece to write. I knew R.K. Mishra in different roles over the years: as a confidante of several senior indian leaders when they were in and out of power; as someone who manned the "back channel" in the india-Pakistan dialogue during the crucial period around the Kargil war; as a personal friend of first, Dhirubhai, and later, Mukesh Ambani; as the Chairman of the Observer Research Foundation and the driving force behind its think tank, which he founded and nurtured until the end of his life; as a keen observer of indian and global politics in their complicated detail; as a fierce indian patriot who always sought to do what was best by his country, whether it was through diplomacy, education, or public life; as someone who worked assiduously behind-the-scenes to strengthen US-indian relations, even as he remained a shrewd judge of both the strengths and the failings of each partner; and, finally and most important, as a dear personal friend who treated me like a son.

It is hard to do justice to these many facets of "RK", as he was fondly known. Others will also remember his storied career in journalism and politics, which he had left behind long before I got to know him. And so much of what I saw of him, at least initially, was mediated through the business of diplomacy, where he played a quiet but important role in helping india, as also india and the United States both, to manage a variety of difficult issues. On this score, I am unfortunately condemned to silence—at least for a while longer. But I mention it because it was the means through which I got to know RK for the first time and because it remained an inescapable part of our interactions right up to his passing.

Two things remain etched in my memory in this regard. First, RK knew everybody who was somebody in indian politics and he never hesitated to reach across the political spectrum if it would help the government of the day better address some thorny or vexatious problem. And second, RK's judgments about indian political developments were precise and unerring: with a knowledge born not simply of the facts but an intimate familiarity with the personalities involved, RK's insights about the possibilities and constraints inherent in a given situation were remarkable and often helped me understand indian politics in a way I could not have otherwise.

Above all else, he was a patriot always seeking to do something for india's good. He had a restless mind. He would call me across the oceans frequently with ideas, questions, suggestions, thoughts about projects, initiatives, and things that should be done, all intended to help india resolve some public policy problem or another. He saw the need for a closer US-indian partnership that would advantage both sides, but without any illusions. Too often, he feared that Washington rushed into situations it did not really understand, and where india was concerned, he went out of his way to reach out to numerous Americans hoping to help them understand india's circumstances and complexities. For his good advice, we remain in his debt.

The Observer Research Foundation was, of course, his obsession, perhaps even before he had founded it. He had great dreams. He always spoke about wanting it

to become "a world- class think tank." And, I think, he would have liked nothing better than to see it become an institution where both indians and foreigners alike would go to first—whether to its scholars, its publications, or its website—for information about critical aspects of indian policy. RK was acutely conscious of the fact that on many subjects of great importance to india—Pakistan, China, and the United States, just to offer a few examples—the level of knowledge within india was often far thinner than most indians would care to admit.

He hoped that the Observer Research Foundation's work would rectify this deficiency and to the end of his life he was constantly engrossed by the challenge of how best to do this. Whether it was through partnerships with institutions abroad, or through the visits of foreign scholars, or through the dispatch of indian scholars for research work in foreign institutions, RK longed to create a cadre of individuals that would be at the leading edge of their discipline and make a significant contribution to public policy analysis in india. This remains an unfinished business, but even a few weeks before his death, in what would be our last meeting, he remained vividly engaged, sketching out ideas for a centre focused on Chinese studies.

While much of our time together would be consumed by either some contemporary problems associated with the bilateral relationship or by RK's interest in strengthening the Observer Research Foundation, what remains with me to this day is the memory of a gentle and dear man who stayed on to become a friend. There was not a single conversation or meeting when business did not invariably give way to RK's deeply felt and expressed concerns about me, my family, and my parents. Simply put, I always felt treated like a son and the numerous times that he and Renuka extended me the hospitality of their home in Delhi—something I could not reciprocate as often—remain etched in my memory.

In the later years of his life, I could never escape the reality that, while RK remained deeply interested in my work and my writing, he was always more interested in me. I feel privileged to have known him and the many others he so generously introduced me to. in so doing, he again shared himself. I was pained to see him several times in the last months of his life as his health failed, but the stoicism with which he carried his discomforts—even as he continued to labour at his own writing and in his managerial endeavors—was inspirational. The deep sorrow I first felt on hearing of his passing, barely a few weeks after my wife, Dhun and I had met him for what turned out to be the final time in Bombay, still lingers on. it remains a constant reminder of the impress he left on me—and of how I still miss him.

RK, dear friend, rest in peace.

TRIBUTE TO R.K. MISHRA

Strobe Talbott

I write in tribute to R. K. Mishra not only on my own behalf, but on that of my several colleagues at the Brookings institution and two members of my family-my wife Brooke and my father Bud-who had the honour and benefit of knowing this wise, compassionate and accomplished patriot of india and citizen of the world. Stephen Cohen-a Brookings Senior Fellow and pre-eminent scholar on South Asia-put me in touch with RK soon after I arrived at the institution in 2002. Steve shared and supported RK's hope that the Observer Research Foundation would help india build its capacity for independent public-policy work. An important part of my job has been to nurture collaboration between Brookings and ORF that Steve and RK first envisioned. RK and I hoped that the partnership would help move each organization from a national to a more global perspective.

The first time I met RK, I sensed in him a kindred spirit in several respects. For one, he too had been a journalist. He had that combination of curiosity, discipline and instinct for recognizing what was important in an idea, an event or a trend, that makes for a superb reporter, commentator and editor. Those qualities also made him a natural when he transferred his energies and talents to the world of public- policy research.

RK loved history-not least because he had played his own role in it. in our many meetings and several travels together, he and I often found ourselves comparing, and sometimes debating, chapters from the story of the Cold War. He occasionally referred to his work for Patriot and Link, causing me to recall pieces I had written for Time and Foreign Affairs. Whatever our differences had been in those days, we totally agreed that the estrangement of the US and india in the first decades of india's independence was more than an irony-it was a tragedy. I count him among those who helped me understand the indian perspective on how and why our countries had ended up on opposite sides of the geo-political divide. We also agreed that the dramatic improvement in the US-indian relationship during the Clinton and George W Bush administrations was a classic example of better-late-than-never-and a transformation to be consolidated, not taken for granted.

RK understood the practice of politics from his own eclectic career and from his relationship with a spectrum of major figures, including indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, PV Narasimha Rao, and Atal Behari Vajpayee. The diversity of legacies associated with those names indicates how his service to the indian people transcended ideology and demonstrated his strong commitment to public service.

I found RK's own political evolution to be fascinating - especially in his telling of it. While starting off on the Left, by the time I knew him, he cheerfully but stubbornly refused to be labelled. He joked that he had found his "comfort spot" in "the radical pragmatic centre." His eyes twinkled with delight at the combination of those two adjectives.

RK also understood diplomacy from first-hand experience, having engaged in Track ii dialogues with Pakistan. if only he could have had his way, there would

have been more progress in reconciling differences between these estranged neighbours.

RK introduced me to several parts of india I had not visited before, although I regret that I never had a chance to see the great city of Calcutta where he had his roots and wrote for several Hindi-language dailies. Nor were my wife and I ever able to take up RK and his wife Renuka on their invitation to show us Kashmir, where Renuka was involved in humanitarian NGO work.

RK had a profound knowledge of the spiritual side of indian culture and civilization. I brought my father, then in his mid-80s, to india just after my mother died. RK took on the task of instructing my father-a most willing pupil-in the Hindu philosophy of life and death. it was deeply comforting to my father. Dad still refers to RK as his guru, and two of RK's books, The Cosmic Matrix and Before The Beginning And After The End, occupy a place of honour in his study on the outskirts of Cleveland.

For all these reasons, and more, I feel honoured to have known this splendid human being-and to offer these words on behalf of some of his many admirers on the far side of the globe.

MEETING WITH RK

Karl Fischer

In March 1972 I returned to india from Kathmandu, where I had spent six months setting up the German Democratic Republic (GDR) Embassy. Before leaving for my post as Vice Consul in Bombay, I had to report to the Head of Mission in Delhi and stayed there for a few days with my parents. My father, Ambassador Herbert Fischer, suggested that Aruna Asaf Ali would be interested in my comments on the situation in Nepal. So we went to meet her at Link House. She took us around and introduced me to her editors. Over a cup of tea we mainly discussed the situation in india after the creation of Bangladesh, touching upon Nepal only on the margins of this talk. When my father had to leave for his next appointment, RK took me aside and we jointly analysed Nepal for a couple of hours. This was my first meeting with him.

As a junior diplomat with a specialization in South Asia, I was impressed by his detailed knowledge and insight into the political changes in South Asia during the last months. Even more, I appreciated his willingness to share his knowledge and perception of possible future developments. He seemed to enjoy the frank depiction of my experience in Nepal, as I laced my elaboration of political and economic conditions in the Hindu Kingdom with experiences I had lived through in my day-to-day contacts with government officials and representatives of the Palace. RK would break out in a hearty laugh when I related some funny incidents. But thereafter, he immediately returned to the main theme of our discussion.

RK posed very pointed questions regarding the influence of the royal family on the political and economic life of the country, as seen in the capital. We agreed that feudal arbitrariness and despotic rule would probably not continue beyond the end of the 20th century. Various experiments of the monarchy, such as the introduction of the party-less system with four professional organisations, even the back to the village campaign intended to make the panchayats more effective, were therefore seen as harbingers of modernisation, which would finally lead to the establishment of democratic institutions. RK also concluded that my description of developments in the industrial estates and in the markets of the larger towns of the country were an indication of a growing market economy that eventually would not tolerate continued appropriation of wealth through extra-economic means by members of the royal family and the feudal nobility.

RK's interest was not limited to politics. When I incidentally mentioned having, over the months, watched how Marwari traders organised their business in Kathmandu, he asked me for more details. I told him how indian traders had a foreboding of difficult times ahead when cheap Chinese goods appeared in the market. Some of the men who liked to chat with me in Hindi on quiet mornings, complained about forced payments and evictions from their shops in prime business areas of the city by people with close connections to the palace. Though carefully worded, one trader even referred to Mafia type practises of the Chinese competitors.

Ordinary folk carrying their marketable goods on the few metalled roads

connecting some of the towns brought forth a different complaint against the Chinese. in the past, they had all along been treated as equals in the flow of traffic and would not budge to give way to an approaching car. One had to drive carefully around them. All this changed rapidly in the vicinity of Chinese construction projects. The speeding Chinese dumper drivers blew the horns of their vehicles and the piercing sound made the poor Nepalis jump aside with whatever they were carrying. However, I found them quite accommodating about such behaviour and was candidly given the reason by some of the men carrying vegetables and earthen pots to the market: 'The Chinese build hospitals near their projects and we and our families are treated there free of charge. We do not even have to pay for the medicines. Our own rulers have nothing similar to offer.'

On being asked about the future of a Communist movement in Nepal, I related how I came to know about six Communist parties. Probably there were more. Walking the streets of Kathmandu, my office secretary would point towards some person passing by and say :"This is the Secretary General of such and such Communist party." At least two of these parties had strong leanings towards Chinese revolutionary thought and practice. I came to know that they had started recruiting among the first generation taxi drivers of Kathmandu.

On the occasion of the coronation of King Birendra, Japan had presented 2000 small cars to Nepal. Otherwise, there would not have been adequate transport for the many guests.

So here there was a group of 2000 new entrants into the service sector ready to be organised. in a subsequent talk with RK, I indicated that this Japanese sales promotion offensive might have been the catalyst for the growth of a section of the Maoist movement that developed at a later stage. During our discussion in 1972, RK predicted the possibility of an essentially rural based communist mass movement for democratic reform in Nepal. Given the prevailing conditions in the country and the international environment he, however, expected an earlier revival of the Nepali Congress, possibly the growth of new parties with an urban middle class social and economic background. They would vie for power and push an enlightened royalty towards moderate reform. in case a communist movement gained strength, changes could be faster and far-reaching, bringing an end to the monarchy and adding another colour to competition in the political system of Nepal.

Following this analysis, RK concluded that we should expect a growing assertion of Nepalese nationalism in the decades to come. Although it could be partially weakened by sub-national ethnic interests, it would certainly have its repercussions on the foreign policy of the Himalayan kingdom. For instance, relations with india could turn less friendly, in case the latter did not give up its big-brother-postures. He anticipated it would take time to address the sensitivities of the Nepalese by modifying established foreign policy paradigms accordingly.

We continued these exchanges in the eighties during my tenure as Deputy Head of Mission of the GDR Embassy in New Delhi and after the unification of Germany. On the rare occasions that we disagreed, we usually agreed to simply accept our positions as controversial and to proceed from there. Characteristically, our relationship was always one of give and take, conducted in an honest and sincere manner. Both of us could reliably work with facts and political assessments we had shared. And rarely was there a meeting when I did not gain a more detailed insight into the ways and working of indian politics.

THE PROFOUND AND THE HUMANE

Ravi Shankar Prasad

My memories of the late R. K. Mishra will always remain an integral part of my life. I met him for the first time in the year 1998 in the company of my sister and well-known TV personality, Anuradha Prasad, who knew him quite well. He gave me all his affection and consideration in the first meeting itself, which laid the foundation of a very profound relationship that continued till the last. I was aware of his deep leftist leanings in his initials years, but as an extraordinary intellectual he was equally aware of its limitations. He grew thereafter as a keen observer and commentator of the growth of post independence indian politics which he was fortunate to observe from very close quarters.

I became a Member of Parliament for the first time in the year 2000 and after I shifted to Delhi, came in to closer contact with him. Practically every month we would meet at least once or twice for long sessions, which gave me the rare privilege to know him and his depth of knowledge all the more. To become a successful political activist it is very important to know the entire context and dynamics of indian politics as it has evolved over the years and he became my real Guru in this field. He also told me how I should shape up as a good Parliamentarian.

He was objective enough to realise that the monopoly of state control and the scourge of licence-permit-quota raj had outlived its utility and that if india had to grow, it needed to unshackle itself. He was indeed in a very advantageous position to say so because, being a leftist himself in his initial years, he had, to his dismay, seen how the overwhelming state control had become counter-productive and crippled the initiative and entrepreneurship so vital for growth. From him I learnt the need for pressing reforms, not only in the economy, but even more in education and other fields of governance. in fact, some of my major speeches in Parliament were on the issue of reforms, the guidance for which had come from Mishraji. Hardly a year into my membership of Parliament, I was privileged to become a Member of the Council of Ministers under Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and my first portfolio was Coal & Mines. I speeded up reforms in both these sectors with great enthusiasm, realizing how critical they were for the growth of infrastructure, in particular, for power. I must admit that Mishraji's critical advice was of great help to me.

Subsequently, I became the Minister of information and Broadcasting and during my tenure the whole issue of foreign investment in the media sector became a very crucial issue. Anything concerning the media is a hot subject and if it relates to foreign direct investment it becomes still hotter. There was lobbying and counter-lobbying. There were powerful forces at play, including those enjoying high patronage. As a Minister in-charge of the department, I was caught in the cross-currents. One day I had a long meeting with Mishraji where I shared my predicament. His one sentence still rings in my ears- 'Editorial independence in india is not a journalistic luxury but an abiding value which has evolved in the course of our freedom movement'. This was sufficient guidance for me to take a very firm stand thereafter. The then Prime Minister Shri Vajpayee and the then Dy. Prime Minister Shri Advani both whole¬heartedly supported my stand. The

relevant FDi guidelines were drafted by me personally and clearly stipulated that the foreign investor would have no editorial control whatsoever.

R.K. Mishra was also an institution builder. He was invariably invited by think-tanks all over the world to reflect upon issues of contemporary importance. it was his mission to establish an institution of international standards of research and exchange which would also become a truly indian think- tank to boldly espouse issues of importance to india, including its strategic needs. The Observer Research Foundation is a shining example of his foresight and leadership. in a very short time it has left a mark on the national and international horizon. I had occasion to attend a track-two diplomacy meeting organised at its behest in Moscow and could see for myself the respect which it commands.

A very significant attribute of his personality was his profound spiritual scholarship. I remember that a few years back, he broke his ankle. it had to be plastered, forcing him to take bed rest for a few months. He utilised this respite to author some of the finest ideas on india's spiritual heritage and the sublime contours of Hindu philosophy.

He was also a very skilful negotiator and an extraordinary strategic thinker, which led Shri Vajpayee to entrust him with back-channel exchanges with the separatist leaders in Kashmir. They knew that he knew his mind and yet they found him sincere and trustworthy. in fact, trust was a very important element of his personality. if he trusted someone he did so with full faith, and ups and downs of fortune were rarely of any consequence in his relationship. it is for this reason that those who came in contact with him sincerely remained with him till the last. Yet, he never flaunted his connections. I knew that for many long years he was very close to indira Gandhi. I tried many times to know something of this special relationship which he rarely revealed and I respected his reticence because maintaining the integrity of relationships was a part of his personality.

A great man with a saintly character and yet a child at heart, he had a sweet tooth just as I do. He had a fondness for *laddoos* (of both *besan* and *gond*). During my visits I would carry big packets of these laddoos and Renukaji (his gracious wife) would immediately confiscate it. He was given a very small particle, just an apology of a piece. He would make faces and once Renukaji would retire from the living room I would pass my share to him, which he would enjoy to his heart's content. Just a glance at our expressions and she would know what had transpired and she couldn't help but smile. He fought his cancer with extraordinary fortitude. He knew the dreaded disease well and yet I rarely found him depressed or talking about his pain. Whenever I met him during the course of his ailment his only concern was the state of the nation and the steps needed to ensure a secure india. By all accounts, he was a man much taller than his deeds and much truer than his surroundings.

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICS

AS I KNEW HIM

A. B. Bardhan

I first heard about Shri R.K. Mishra when he was working as the Jaipur correspondent of the *Patriot* English daily, launched by Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali from Delhi. *Patriot* and its sister magazine *Link* were in those days recognized mouthpieces of Left and secular politics in the country. They stood for the advance of the secular democratic polity in india and were powerful political weapons against the communal reactionary politics represented by the Jan Sangh and its mentor, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Later, its new avatar became the BJP along with its entire Sangh Parivar.

This was then an organized trend within the Congress. This trend stood up also against the strong rightist forces represented by a number of top leaders who, after the death of Nehru, thought the field was now open for them. Confrontation grew on several issues, such as the presidential election, the nationalization of banks, the cancellation of the privy purses, and even standing up to American pressure.

Those issues witnessed a sort of convergence between the actions of this trend and views of the CPI. *Patriot* acted as the spokesman and mobiliser for getting these decisions implemented. These episodes took place in the period of the late sixties and the seventies. Later on things changed and it was no longer the same.

R.K. Mishra had already made a mark as a journalist and as an independent thinker. He was with the Congress, but had pronounced Left views. His reports from Rajasthan were always worth reading. in the company of Communist leaders like H.K. Vyas, Ramanand Agarwal, Mohan Poonamiya and others, R.K. Mishra was able to form a group which was the centre for all secular democratic and progressive causes. For more than a year he was also responsible for publishing a Hindi daily named *Navayug* in collaboration with the well- known leader of Rajasthan, Hardeo Joshi. He was responsible for creating a number of good journalists who went on to distinguish themselves. About this time Arunaji invited him to Delhi to come to the *Patriot*, to work with such noted editors as Edattatta Narayanan.

In course of time, certain differences cropped up which made him sever his relations with *Patriot*. He went on to edit another daily, the *Observer of Business and Politics*. This was a venture financed by Sri Dhirubhai Ambani. But to the credit of R.K. Mishra, it must be said, that he did not allows his views and his editorial pen to be dominated or coloured by Big Money.

The *Observer* did not take off as a daily in the face of severe competition from the established English dailies. But its status as an observer of events and developments in the country gave birth later to the 'Observer Research Foundation', which can be said to be a standing memorial to R.K. Mishra's intellectual outlook, his penchant for research and well-thought out conclusions on various issues that confront the country in the contemporary world. He was able to gather together a galaxy of administrators, high ranking civil and military officers who had served their time in the country's highest echelons and had a wide

experience and expertise in their fields, as well as renowned journalists, politicians, economists and so forth in the conference halls and committee rooms of the ORF. Mishra would also try to ensure that different schools of thought contend in these seminars and hold discussions on a range of topics. The products of those intellectual exercises, published as papers and books by the ORF make stimulating reading.

On behalf of the ORF, Mishra reached out to and interacted with other such think-tanks, groups and societies in other countries, in order to analyse the complex problems that modern society and a fast-changing world has to face and deal with. That task, however, remains incomplete.

A ROBUST REALIST

Abid Hussain

Death should have spared Mishraji to complete the work he was doing. He still had something to say when death silenced him.

For a long time, I knew him but was not close to him. It was much later that circumstances brought us closer. I got associated with him in executing certain projects he had sponsored to strengthen the India-US relationship. I began to meet him, mostly at his house, to discuss and plan our approach to the project. Besides the subject in hand, he would often tell me about the issues he had taken deeply to heart, and aspirations that motivated him to awaken a new consciousness among the active politicians and parliamentarians. These stimulating conversations seemed all too short to me and I wanted them to continue. But then the meetings became less frequent due to his fatal ailment and came to a stop when he left Delhi for treatment.

Mishraji's role as an active politician, parliamentarian and journalist brought out the depth of his involvement in strengthening the democratic process in the country, despite his several misgivings about its weakneses vis-a-vis India. Politics remained the bed-rock of his activities. In politics, he believed, could be found solutions to some of India's prevailing problems. He believed that, since politics had created the mess, better politics alone would be able to clean it up.

It was Mrs. Indira Gandhi who had recognized in him the talent to push some of her political measures through with his capacity to persuade and win over the support of fence sitters and political opponents. He had the right credentials to pick up the gauntlet. He justified the trust she had placed in him. Mishraji had a native talent for bringing about harmony among discordant political elements and persuading them to work together for a cause.

He had an abiding faith in the values of Marxism. He spoke eloquently and wrote forcefully in favour of a leftist approach to issues. But his intellectual legacy was primarily 'humanism'. Supported by firebrands like Aruna Asif Ali and others, he propagated ideas and plans that, more often than not, went against the grain of status quoists, who were discomfited when he crossed the line from critical writings on economic issues and 'intruded' in to the arena of mainstream politics. That he saw economics through the matrix of politics was not acceptable to them. But he continued to plow a lonely furrow.

Then came the sea change in the eco-political situation of the world with the end of the Cold-War, the demise of the Soviet Union and with the ushering in of the IT revolution. It signalled an increase in international trade, the rising profile of a sizable middle class both in India and the Indian diaspora in the USA. Mr. Mishra was quick to see the futility of pursing the old paradigm of development. He saw the limits of textbook socialism, but also knew well that the humanist spirit and concerns that motivated socialism could never be invalidated. He remained a strong opponent of any top-down approach. Concern about institutions and norms became central to his thinking. He believed that research and rational thinking could help to find solutions to the current problems of the nation. In pursuance of

this belief, he set up the ORF to undertake studies and do research work on issues of major concern, through the application of appropriate methodology. ORF provided the opportunity to select scholars to study in depth issues of politics, economics and international affairs and come up with possible solutions. ORF also became—as Mishraji had hoped and worked for—a veritable think tank, a cradle of intellectual excellence and research.

All that apart, I have also witnessed Mishraji in a moment of pure spirituality. I saw him sink in to silence, immersed in a mystical state of spiritual splendour which, one might think, was surrendering its secrets to him.

He may have essentially been a man of science and reason having little to do with conventional religion. But he believed in "the homage that the finite mind pays to the inexhaustible of the infinite". He knew of no single religion which could satisfy the spiritual needs and emotional concerns of the vast variety of human beings.

In the books he wrote, he scientifically expounded the Cosmic process of which the Upanishads speak.

Buddhism had a singular attraction for him. He loved to navigate through the different streams of wisdom that flowed from it. It made him reflect on the harsh realities of life—the law of toil, the sufferings of existence, the theme of impermanence and attainment of nirvana. Buddha's spirit of reason, his rational and empirical approach had captivated his mind. Buddha does not ask us to accept anything on authority. He perceived the Buddha as a kindly, eternally young ascetic seated cross-legged on the lotus of purity with his right hand raised in admonition—the two words that fill the heart and mind being prajna and karuna (wisdom and love/compassion).

His remarkable wife, Renuka, stood by him like a rock all through his illness. She was the anchor that kept his boat of life steady in times most difficult and full of turmoil. I, like many others who came to know her, was deeply impressed by her poise and patience. She remained an image of grace and purity.

Now no more, RK is still like a free moth broken out of the cocoon, floating aloft untouched and untouchable.

A SELF-MADE MAN

T.N. Chaturvedi

I met R.K. Mishra for the first time in 1955 at Jaipur. He had been invited by Hardeo Joshi to take up the editorship of a Hindi daily that the state Congress Party wanted to launch. Hardeo Joshi was probably at the time both the General Secretary of the state Congress as well as the Secretary of the Legislature Party in the Assembly. It so happened that the two leading Hindi newspapers of the region were opposed to Mohanlal Sukhadia, who, after a contest, had succeeded the late Jai Narain Vyas, a veteran of the State People's Conference, as the Chief Minister. Sukhadia, a young politician, was at the time a member of Vyasji's cabinet. Vyasji enjoyed a good equation with the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was particularly pleased with this change in the leadership of the Congress Assembly Party and the way it was brought about. Clearly, Sukhadia had to counter the fairly strong propaganda against him locally if he was to establish his credibility and earn the confidence of the Congress High Command.

At that time, the state of Rajasthan had been placed in the Constitution as a Part B state. Naturally, the scope for even legitimate intervention in various matters by the Union government was great. The state government had to seek approval of the Home Ministry about practically all important postings and the Bills to be introduced in the Assembly. Many issues regarding abolition of jagirdari in Rajasthan were alive and they were quite a headache for the state government headed by Sukhadia. Regional rivalries were rampant. The integration of services at different levels was still pending. There were many law and order problems in the border state. So the Sukhadia ministry had to cover its flank, administratively and politically.

As many complaints at times from Rajasthan would reach the then Congress President, U.N. Dhebar, quite often the Chief Minister would receive letters from him or the senior Congress General Secretary, Srimannarayan Aggarwal. All these communications were not always couched in politically polite or mild language. Sukhadiaji was keen that all letters, whether a reply was asked for or not, must be responded to with full details after obtaining authentic information from the concerned authorities. A similar sense of urgency can, then, well be understood when a communication was sent by the Prime Minister, Home Minister or other important ministers. Some of these things would be blown up in the local vernacular press and even in the Delhi papers. The government's side would be ignored.

It was in this kind of politico-administrative environment of suspicion, uncertainty and veiled hostility that Sukhadiaji was required to operate; hence the decision to start a newspaper with a suitably competent editor. He wanted the paper to be not just a mouthpiece of the government, but one that must win the confidence of the people in the different regions of this newly- formed state. I was a witness to the pioneering role R.K. Mishra and the team that he formed played at Navyug, the Hindi daily.

As a new and young IAS officer belonging to Rajasthan cadre, I reached Jaipur as SDM in September 1953. By a quirk of circumstance, coming from UP, with no

first hand knowledge of Rajasthan, I found myself catapulted after fourteen months or so as Secretary to the Chief Minister, much to my utter perplexity and the amusement of many, since my predecessor was a seasoned and highly experienced officer who had retired as the Chairman, Board of Revenue. But it was not for me to choose my assignment. It was in that capacity that I met R.K. Mishra. We were more or less the same age. He also hailed from an adjoining district in UP He had known something about me and my background from some persons known to both our families. That apart, at the personal level, our chemistry probably matched. We grew quite friendly, though I had to observe ostensible distance in public, being a part of the administration. The friendly feelings which both of us entertained, and our contact lasted till his unfortunate passing away, even if there were gaps in our personal meetings at different periods.

Mishraji, in his capacity as the Editor of Navyug, proved to be of great help to Sukhadia and his ministers. I found Sukhadia and Hardeo Joshi gave him full confidence and support. At the same time, he reciprocated this confidence. He built up the paper almost from scratch and within a year or so made it almost an equal to its senior contemporaries. Its popularity increased due to its news value and, at times, because of its critical editorials and comments about governmental work. The public began to feel that it was not just an echo of the ruling party.

Again, I could see that, as an Editor and as a person, R.K. Mishra developed acquaintances and contacts across the socio-political world. Besides, he cultivated a deep interest in the history, culture and future development of Rajasthan—an interest which I shared with him. Soon Mishraji, besides his basic responsibilities, began to participate in the variegated activities of Jaipur. He began to understand the pulse of the people and could thus advise Mohanlal Sukhadia and his colleagues on administrative matters relating to the public good or expectations that could have far reaching political repercussions. But I never saw him throwing his weight about or interfering with the working of officers at any level. He had developed good relations at all levels, a quality that I admired particularly because of my own tricky responsibilities as Secretary to the Chief Minister where, at times, the borderline between the purely administrative and the political was rather thin.

What I gathered from him about men and affairs in Rajasthan at that time was of use to me in other assignments, where I worked with all prominent political leaders belonging to various factions within the Congress and the opposition parties. At times, he could thus provide useful inputs to the Chief Minister's thinking and decision-making process. And I must add here that Sukhadia was a very competent and a wide-awake politician with grassroots contacts. Nobody could lead him by the nose. Though never an active participant to political confabulations, the Chief Minister trusted me enough to occasionally mention some things confidentially to me. I myself benefited a great deal from the information or views gathered in this way.

Let me mention a few other areas to which R.K. Mishra had contributed. He was of considerable help when a Commission was set up to enquire into the Nathdwara Temple theft case in which accusations were made even against the Chief Minister. He suggested to Sukhadia that he should shed his insular attitude, or the image of being only a Rajasthani politician and become more outgoing, meet frequently with the Prime Minister, Central ministers and other important people outside Rajasthan. Sukhadia followed his advise and ultimately succeeded.

He not only persuaded Prime Minister Nehru to inaugurate Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan in October 1959 but even earlier, he saw to it that Nehru participated in a grand and historic function, attended by a large number of Chief Ministers and other VIPs, for the rehabilitation of Gadia Lohars (a wandering tribe reputed to be supporters of Maharana Pratap against the Moghuls) at Chittorgarh. To his great satisfaction and political advantage, Sukhadia finally won Nehru's confidence.

The development of the state was always uppermost in Sukhadia's mind. During some casual discussions, R.K. Mishra mentioned the potential of tourism for Rajasthan. Not that Sukhadia was unaware of this, but he felt that the infrastructure in the state was inadequate. He set about rectifying the situation by first creating a post of Director of Tourism, and then delegating administrative and financial powers to a professional. Soon, tourism in the state began to acquire a momentum of its own. As a journalist with rich contacts in the world of the media, R.K. Mishra suggested that to project the image of the state government and the Chief Minister's leadership and work, it was necessary to gear up the public relations machinery and equip it properly with professionals who could assess the people's reactions and mood, as well as of other media persons.

In October 1959, on my return from Washington where I had gone on a Fellowship with the World Bank, I joined as District Magistrate and Collector at Ajmer and thereafter served in Jaipur in various positions in the Secretariat. My contacts with R.K. Mishra resumed. I felt that he was becoming more and more religious minded and interested in spiritual matters. He had developed a keen interest in our old heritage and scriptures. Jaipur was famous for ancient Vedic learning. I remember that in a meeting with the Chief Minister, he had once talked about an institution set up by Pt. Motilal Shastri, a highly reputed Vedic scholar of Jaipur. After Shastriji passed away, the institution was facing many problems. Shastriji was an erudite person, had written many books and many manuscripts of his were still to be published. Mishra wanted the government to extend help. Shastriji's wife had met Sukhadiaji and an effort in that direction had started. Perhaps Pt. Motilal Shastri had accepted him as his chela (disciple) some time and he had studied scriptures under his guidance. Long after he moved to Delhi, in the 1990s, his spiritual intimacy with his Guru's writings resulted in four erudite philosophical and spiritual works viz., *Before the Beginning and After the End, The Cosmic Matrix, The Realm of Supraphysics, and The Ultimate Dialogue*, all published by Rupa, Delhi. The attempt was to expound ancient wisdom in a modern scientific idiom. I was honoured that he asked me to introduce one of these books, which was to be released by the then Governor of Rajasthan in the University premises. Both of us went to Jaipur for the purpose, enabling us to re-establish contact.

After I left Jaipur in 1965 to work at the National Academy of Administration, Mussorie, I lost touch with him. It so happened that R.K. Mishra too had moved to Delhi to work with the daily, Patriot and the weekly, Link, where he made a place for himself in the world of English journalism. In course of time, he became a prominent social figure in Delhi and ably edited both these papers. Possibly, this is when he began his foray into active politics. His qualities impressed many political leaders and others. He became particularly friendly with some of them and was elected to the Rajya Sabha. When I returned to Delhi as Chief Secretary

in 1970 and worked in other jobs, we met sometimes and had the opportunity for brief discussions on different matters, though I am not really privy to his life and work in Delhi.

In 1976 or 1977 he visited Chandigarh, where I was Chief Commissioner. I invited him home for breakfast and we had a friendly chat. I soon realized that he was developing many more new interests, especially, social service, research in Indian politics, diplomacy and international relations. He was a believer in what is usually called Nehruvian socialism. As both of us were busy with our own responsibilities, when I was Education Secretary, Home Secretary in the Union Government and later on Comptroller and Auditor General of India, we did not have much personal contact. We would mostly come across each other socially. I could see that he had access to the highest in the land in all walks of life, but this did not affect his amiability or social relationships.

By the time I was elected to the Rajya Sabha, he had finished his term. He was busy with the Observer Research Foundation which, over the years, has done good work. That he could persuade the Ambanis to help set up the Foundation is a remarkable achievement. The ORF's mobilization of talent and linkages with similar world think tanks are highly commendable. He did, off and on, send me a few of its publications. While he was looking after the Foundation, a friend informed me about R.K. Mishra's serious illness and the operation in the United States. Naturally I enquired about his health on his return to India. He sounded better. He promised to meet soon and did visit me in Delhi. He told me about the state of his health and more about his work, specially about his vision for the Foundation. Unfortunately, he had to frequently commute to Mumbai for treatment.

Some time earlier, he had invited me to preside over an ORF function in Bangalore. Pranab Mukherjee had agreed to inaugurate a local chapter of the Foundation in Bangalore. Soon a date was fixed. Unfortunately, none of this came to pass as the programme was cancelled because of political developments. Mishraji was extremely disappointed.

A few months before he passed away, I received a request on his behalf from Surendra Singh, a former Chief Secretary, UP and Union Cabinet Secretary, that the Foundation was organizing a high level three day seminar about the prospects of development in UP Surendra Singh had agreed to coordinate the programme. At the instance of Mishraji, I was asked to participate and preside over an important session where representatives of different political parties would present their personal views about what their parties thought about the future of UP's development. Though R.K. Mishra was to be unavoidably absent during the seminar, I nevertheless gave my consent in view of the significance of the seminar.

In a way, this was my last personal contact with R.K. Mishra. Little surprise that it was a great shock to see his obituary in the Delhi edition of *The Hindu*, having known him closely over five decades.

R.K. Mishra was a man of many parts. He had a pleasing personality and a tremendous capacity to make friends. He had friends in politics across party lines. He was equally at home in the world of scholarship. During his last years, he was busy in trying to help in the resolution of India-Pakistan disputes. He worked indefatigably to bring about the Agra Summit of the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the then Pakistan President, Pervez Musharaff. He believed in

track-II diplomacy. He would keep himself in the background. He showed remarkable imagination and tenacity in chalking out second-track channels. Confidentiality and secrecy were always maintained.

Throughout his life, R.K. Mishra was a voracious reader with a wide range—political affairs, economic development, education, governance, international relations to philosophy and spirituality. He was always helpful to anybodywho approached him for anything. A self-made man, with wide human sympathies, he was a thinker and an idealist, but also a man of action, and a doer par excellence. The Observer Research Foundation is a standing monument of his vision, scholarship and hard work. His friends and acquaintances, in different walks of life and spheres of work will miss his sweet and friendly voice and kind gestures. I pay my respectful tribute to his memory, which many of us will long cherish.

A RATIONALIST

Surendra Singh

In the course of a discussion in 1990 or 1991 about the state of affairs in India and, in particular, in Uttar Pradesh, my old friend Jitendra Prasada suggested to me that it would be useful for me to meet R.K. Mishra. I had heard a lot of praise for Mishraji from various friends and had been keen to meet him. Jitendra Prasada arranged for us to meet over dinner at his home.

That meeting turned out to be a fruitful one for me. I was most impressed by Mishraji's knowledge of various political, economic and social issues and his sharp analysis of individuals, events and trends. Over the next five years or so, Mishraji and I met a number of times to discuss a wide range of issues—from politics to the declining standards of governance in India, from the state of affairs in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to developments in South India. Our interaction intensified during the period 1994-96 when I was Cabinet Secretary to the Government of India.

The period from 1995 onwards was a period of considerable political uncertainty and turmoil following the defeat of the Congress party in a number of important state elections. Many felt that the new economic reforms introduced by the Government of India were responsible for the unpopularity of the Congress. The possibility that the Congress would not be able to form the government on its own after the general election of 1996 seemed very real. Mishraji felt that it was time for the Congress to start building alliances with like-minded regional parties, given the greater likelihood of coalition governments in the future. In our discussions of the fast changing political scene, I found his unerringly rational and accurate analysis and forecasts extremely valuable. It is then that I discovered that a large number of persons, not only from the Congress, but from political parties over the entire political spectrum used to meet him and consult him.

As it happened, the Congress party did lose the general election and a short-lived BJP government followed by the United Front government supported by Congress was sworn in. Soon afterwards I went off to Washington D.C. to join the World Bank and my interactions with Mishraji become less frequent. We, however, kept in touch over the telephone and whenever I visited Delhi I made it a point to touch base with him, resuming our more intense interactions when I finally returned to Delhi after completing my assignment in Washington. He was by then fully engrossed in building the Observer Research Foundation. We often discussed the concept and modalities related to it. He was very concerned, apart from various other issues, about the declining standards of governance in India and felt that this was the cause for most of the country's travails. He wanted the ORF to play a meaningful role in addressing this problem and become instrumental in helping to solve it.

Mishraji was a deep political thinker. His philosophy was shaped to a great extent by his intense knowledge of ancient Hindu scriptures, adapted to modern times. He was deeply religious and, at the same time, totally secular.

Among his most endearing qualities was his quiet but impishly delightful sense of

humour. Another was his immense loyalty to people whom he liked and eagerness to do whatever he could to help them.

Mishraji often gave me advice on various matters, official as well as personal. Some of it was at my request, but often it was given *suo motu*. It was always well thought out and sound. Mostly I acted on his advice; sometimes I did not and, invariably, regretted it later.

My abiding memory of Mishraji would be his immense love for India and his burning desire to do all he could do help his country overcome its problems and reach its rightful destiny.

I consider myself very fortunate to have had him as a friend.

THE PERSONIFICATION OF UNITED FRONT

Arjun Sengupta

When I first met RK, he was already a doyen of left-wing journalism. Editing Patriot and Link, following in the footsteps of Edattatta Narayanan and C. Chittaranjan was not an easy task, as the combined readership of these two leftist papers was much more influential than their circulation numbers would suggest. Every policymaker would read them and a vast number of political workers, not only in the Left parties but also in the Congress and other national organizations, would read and discuss the news and analysis published in these papers. RK had a captivating style of writing. But more than that, he had an analytical approach to contemporary events that made you think beyond their simple news value.

RK had the urge and the ability to understand the points of view of all parties concerned about any particular event. He had, of course, a liberal leftist point of view which, in the beginning, was much on the lines of Communist Party of India, as shaped by PC. Joshi and Ajay Ghosh and developed by Edattatta Narayan and Aruna Asaf Ali, if not also Nikhil Chakravartty and Mohit Sen. But over time RK's leftism grew—one can even say metamorphosed—in to a kind of personal ideology, that crossed the bounds of any dogma and sectarianism, and made him reach out to others so as to understand them by comprehending their point of view. He genuinely believed that most people in India—political leaders, activists and trade unionists—could be persuaded to see the merits of a leftist perspective. Who would oppose a line that emphasizes the cause of the poor and the development of the nation within the framework of self-reliance and social justice? He did recognize that there are people on the 'other side', but those on the side of the progressives vastly outnumbered them and they could be mobilized to act and at least support the broad leftist line through persuasive arguments.

In a sense, RK was a quintessential ideologue of the United Front. For him no one was politically untouchable so long as he/she was amenable to reasoning. For any interactive reasoning with others you needed to understand their points of view from their own interest and value system. Once you do that, you can build upon it to reach a common approach. That is why I call him the quintessential champion of the United Front. You first listen to and talk with the person across the table, understand the 'what, how and the why' of what he thinks, then you find a link or a base for a meeting of minds and build upon it.

These characteristics of RK made many of his left-wing friends move away from him as, when the chips were down, they found it difficult to overcome their sectarianism. Left friends who left him were often bitter and venomous and this must have hurt him, but he never lost his faith in the rationale behind understanding and reconciliation.

It is worth noting how this trait of RK expressed itself in catholicity so rare among both the Left and the Right in this country. RK would see no reason to discriminate against other leftists, the Lohiaite socialists or followers of Jayaprakash, not to speak of the Communists of different hues. It was a delight to listen to his analysis of JP's movement and the difference between Lohia and

Jayaprakash. He played an instrumental role in bringing Aruna Asaf Ali into the fold of the Communists, no less Edattatta Narayan. He was not overly friendly with either George Fernandes or Ashoka Mehta, although he would not shun them even at the height of their opposition to the Communists.

It was not difficult for him to expand the circle of his friendship and understanding to include other leftists and therefore to work together with the left in the Congress. Nehru influenced him like many other leftist friends. But more than nehru, or even PC. Joshi, the United Front leader of the Communist Party, he was attracted by Nehruruvians like P.N. Haksar, Mohan Kumaramanglam and D.P Dhar and the young Turk leaders like K.R. Ganesh and Raghunath Reddy. In RK I found not only a sympathetic chord, but also a wise political understanding of the conditions in india which only a United Front minded person like RK could grasp. I saw how these leaders often sought him out to get his views on a contemporary development to help them work out a possible course of action. RK unhesitatingly responded to their requests, not necessarily to influence them according to his own point of view, but to analyse their problems from their own perceived understanding and interest. Over time, RK became so popular with his left-wing friends in the Congress Party that it elected him to the Rajya Sabha. He found himself becoming an indispensable adviser to indira Gandhi and her close associates, even during the Emergency. Though he never supported the Emergency, he understood the compulsions that led Mrs. Gandhi to impose it. RK was one person who had almost unlimited access to Mrs. Gandhi—a situation which some of his friends could ill digest.

The spread of his friendship extended to many of the rightist leaders of the BJP or their Jan Sangh predecessors. I have never seen anybody, with his kind of ideological persuasions, taken more seriously than RK by some of the Jan Sangh leaders, including L.K. Advani and later the younger RSS intellectuals. RK would talk to and argue with them, giving his interpretation on the events and personalities which, evidently, these leaders found attractive and persuasive.

On numerous occasions, I had a chance to discuss with RK this trait of tolerance and understanding of personalities whose views were rabidly reactionary. RK would often succeed in persuading me to see their positive side though on many occasions I did not agree with him. Though attracted to his catholic attitude, I could never quite understand how he gravitated towards Hindu spiritualism. He told me it was his Guru's influence. The influence must have been profound indeed, for he devoted long hours, for years, to disseminating his guru's wisdom of the Vedas for the English reading people. The fruits of his labour for his guru were four great books, the last of them sadly unfinished. All this left me still confused, but none-the-less with a deep admiration for his honesty and devotion to his endeavour, spiritual or otherwise.

RK had the confidence to extend his ideological strategy (of the United Front) to international politics, especially in dealing with Russia, Pakistan and the militants in Kashmir. In fact, he was the instigator and pioneer of the "second track diplomacy" with Pakistan and the alienated in Kashmir. In this, he earned the confidence of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his adviser, Brajesh Mishra, and was successful in gathering a number of former Generals and Admirals willing to talk with Kashmiri leaders, besides some of the major bureaucrats and politicians of Pakistan. I have seen RK in these meetings managing the whole delicate affair with amazing finesse and a command over details that he brought to bear on a wide perspective of political developments. RK, simply, was remarkable.

These reminiscences will remain incomplete without a mention about his close association with the ambanis. Dhirubhai ambani was a rare personality in indian history—an entrepreneur who started from scratch to end up with an empire of successful enterprises.

He and his family helped people of various shades of opinion and political affiliations. in fact, I have still to see a single successful leader who has not been helped by Ambani when such help was sought.

Dhirubhai was a great admirer of indira Gandhi and the Congress party, firmly believing that india's future would be safest under her leadership. Dhirubhai asked RK to help him come into contact with party functionaries and other political personalities.

Over time, RK became a personal friend of Dhirubhai, something to which I have been a witness. Later, the Ambanis helped RK to establish the Observer Research Foundation. RK used the opportunity to build up the organization. After Dhirubhai's death, his family continued its support to the ORF. all that aside, what really inspired and drove RK was the conviction that a world class think tank was a sorely needed institution for india, and he needed all the support he could get—financial or otherwise—and he was not the one to be too finicky about it.

RK has passed away, leaving behind a legacy of inspiring leadership and dedication to work, whether it be for a national cause, for revitalizing failing organizations or building new ones, bringing adversaries together to generate an understanding between them, as also the catholicity he showed in his friendships that won him allies Left, Right and centre, as it were. Some of us who have seen RK from close quarters will never cease to admire him for his dedication and inspiring devotion to building tolerance and enhancing the welfare of our people.

PUBLIC POLICY

SEEKING ANCHORAGE IN INDIAN CIVILISATION

J. K. Bajaj

I had the good fortune to meet Sri Rishi Kumar Mishra in October 2008, after a long interval. I had no idea that this would be my last chance to sit with him and draw from his infinite experience and wisdom.

The long drawn-out disease had made him extremely weak and frail. But he had lost nothing of the sharpness of his intellect and his irrepressible joie-de-vivre. It was something special about him. He was always deeply concerned about the state of the nation, never frivolous. But even while talking about the most worrisome issues he managed to convey a sense of participating in a great effort of reconstruction and a sense of joy at being able to thus participate. after meeting with him one always came back inspired to do something, to initiate a new effort. He made you concerned, never depressed or despondent.

During our last meeting he ebulliently talked about a great many issues concerning the country and the world notwithstanding his physical frailness. I particularly recall one of the many anecdotes he related then. The incident says so much about the personality of the man and his commitments that I cannot resist the temptation of narrating it in full.

It was just before the second Gulf War. The US was then preparing to invade Iraq. Mishraji happened to be in Washington at that time, and visited the Pentagon on an invitation from a veteran foreign policy strategist and defence analyst. He asked for Mishraji's comment on the Iraq policy of the US. Mishraji told him that the Americans were making a great error in invading Iraq. They would get into Iraq, but would not know how to come out. The Americans, he said, were going there under the impression that the Shias would be grateful to them for deposing Saddam and would come out on the streets with bouquets of flowers to welcome the liberating American forces. We Indians, Mishraji told him, had lived with the Shias for centuries; we know what happens when they come out on the streets—they do not carry bouquets of flowers in their hands. They carry chains instead, with which they keep beating themselves and there is blood all around. Americans, Mishraji said, had not seen them thus; they did not know the Shias or the Muslims in general. and, they did not know what they were getting into.

A couple of years later, Mishraji received an e-mail from the same veteran analyst telling him that his judgement about the American Iraq policy was remarkably prescient and asking him whether he had anything to suggest to help them get out of the mess. Mishraji wrote back that the Indian wise men believed that when caught in a bog it is best not to try too hard to get out; the more you try the deeper you sink. Therefore, it was best for the americans to stick with the job and patiently wait for the situation to change.

There are several similar incidents of high diplomacy— involving the Chinese, the Pakistanis and the americans—in which he had participated. All these reflected a certain style. He conducted his diplomacy from the secure ground of Indian civilisational insights and commitments. He was very well read and knowledgeable

in the extensive Indian literature and tradition. But he had gained his practical knowledge not by reading alone; he had also learnt from the wise men of his time, for whom he had great respect and reverence. Mishraji had promised his guru that he would abide by his instructions to render into English, at due time, his interpretation of his guru's version of the Vedas. This promise Mishraji spent the last years of his life fulfilling. He was able to complete four volumes of the work but the fifth and last he could not finish.

In this respect, he was himself like the Indian wise men of previous generations. He learnt from both his guru and his own study of the Indian civilisational literature. He tried to repay the debt that he thus incurred to his teacher, to the ancient sages and to the Indian civilisation by keeping this stream of learning alive through his own writings and actions. But most importantly, he took this learning as the basis of his ^ activity in the world and applied it to the specific contexts on hand. He tried to comprehend every mundane situation from the perspective of the great learning he was privileged to imbibe as an Indian. And that is why he could often see beyond the immediate context and arrive at innovative solutions to mundane problems. This is what made important people of his time seek his company and advice. He probably used this talent most effectively in high diplomacy, which he seems to have taken as his vocation. He began his diplomatic encounters by emphasising his commitment to Indian civilisational values and Indian national interests. And then, as in the interaction with the US strategic establishment quoted above, he drew on what this experience and knowledge could teach in the given context. It is this anchorage in the Indian civilisational learning and experience that gave a cutting edge to his diplomatic efforts. This is how he was able to serve the interests of India in several difficult situations. And this is why Indian Prime Ministers from Indira Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee found it expedient to utilise his diplomatic acumen in critical situations.

Mishraji was, of course, not a career diplomat. The kind of diplomacy that he conducted is often called track-two diplomacy. But high diplomacy has always been the domain of those who think of themselves as representatives of their civilisation, tradition and history. Mere representatives of the state perform only routine correspondence and commerce between states. Such correspondence and commerce between states has indeed increased enormously in modern times and, correspondingly, the number of career diplomats in the world has become very large. It is not surprising that they refer to their routine functioning as the primary diplomatic channel and to the diplomacy of those outside the official hierarchy as track- two. But for conducting diplomacy on really crucial issues, nations continue to depend even today, as they have always done in the past, upon those who can effectively represent both the state and their civilisation. Official diplomacy proves of little avail in difficult situations. That is why, when the war for the liberation of Bangladesh was looming on the horizon, Indira Gandhi sent her arch-opponent, Jayaprakash Narayan, as her personal emissary to the powerful capitals of the world. Mishraji was a practitioner of such diplomacy.

But Mishraji was not merely a wise representative and upholder of Indian civilisation and tradition. He was also deeply concerned about the condition of India and her people today. In fact, it was this concern of his that brought my colleagues and me in touch with him for the first time. We had been long concerned with the rather low per capita production of food and the resultant large-scale hunger and malnutrition that has prevailed in India for about a couple of centuries now. In this context, we had written a book recalling the timeless

Indian discipline of growing food in plenty and sharing it widely and abundantly. This discipline of growing and sharing also required that no responsible householder would sit down to eat without ensuring that everyone else—not only human beings but also animals, birds and insects—within his domain of responsibility and knowledge had been fed. We had searched through the literature of India and compiled extensive evidence of the great insistence with which this discipline of plenty had been traditionally prescribed and practiced throughout Indian history. And, we had tried to show how both the components of the discipline— growing in plenty and sharing in plenty—had been deliberately destroyed in the early stages of British administration in India and how we had failed to restore this discipline and continued, instead, the policy of scarcity and deprivation even decades after achieving Independence.

Mishraji came across the book, perhaps through Sri Ramswarupji, who was revered by many including Mishraji as a great rishi of our times. The civilisational anchorage of our book and the effort to deal with a current problem from the perspective of traditional Indian understanding and commitment must have appealed to Mishraji. Given his concern for the current state of India, he would have also been touched by the prevailing state of hunger and malnutrition. He made the effort to locate us and thus began a long and often intense association that at least we, my colleagues and I, found greatly fulfilling and a great learning experience.

Mishraji was not merely a thinker, he was also a doer. He had liked the book; agreed with the contents; was concerned with the problem that the book dealt with; and believed that the problem was of critical significance for the health of the Indian nation. So he had to do something about it! Almost immediately he began contacting political leaders, planners, senior bureaucrats and scholars to explore the possibility of organising a seminar on the issue; he asked many of them to personally meet us and hear what we had to say in the book. Within a couple of months a seminar on the issue of ensuring plentiful availability of food for all was held in Delhi.

The seminar was extraordinary in many ways, but the most important aspect of it was that senior leaders from across the entire political spectrum participated in it. And all of them agreed that the issue of food transcended political differences and that the political class as a whole needed to quickly do something to ensure that the problem of hunger and malnutrition did not remain unresolved for much longer.[2]

This seminar brought to the fore another important aspect of Mishraji's personality. Mishraji was a political person; yet he could transcend political divides. He had no sympathy for the current fashion among journalists, scholars and educated middle-class Indians, who were generally in the habit of decrying and loudly denigrating politicians and the political process. He respected both the politicians and the political processes. He was often worried that the national political parties had begun to bypass the political processes that made it possible for the voice of the grass-root level worker to reach the national leadership.

As a political person, Mishraji was fundamentally a Congressman. In his early journalistic career in Jaipur, he was close to the long-serving Congress Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mohanlal Sukhadia. Later, he was part of the inner circle of Indira Gandhi and served as a member of the Rajya Sabha. He was fascinated

by the grassroots political culture of the Congress; he used to tell several stories about the core significance of the district presidents in the party. and he often regretted that younger leaders were not aware of the importance of the Congress workers at that level.

Notwithstanding his association with the Congress, he kept close and cordial relations with leaders of almost all political parties. This was, of course, part of the political culture of an earlier, less rancorous period of Indian democracy. But for Mishraji, keeping such relationships was not merely a matter of political courtesies. He firmly believed that it was possible and necessary for all political parties to evolve a common approach on a large number of issues of concern to the nation. There need not be an adversarial approach on all issues. The seminar that he organised on our book was an object lesson in such a trans-political approach.

Mishraji would not have been content by just organising a national seminar on an issue like food and hunger in India. Immediately following the seminar, he began thinking about getting something practical done. Given the core place the issue had in Indian civilisational literature, he agreed with us that the religious establishment of India was best placed to help in assuaging the hunger of the people in the immediate context and to convince the planners of the need for substantially improving agriculture and enhancing the production of food in India.

For almost two years, he, along with some of my colleagues and me and occasionally accompanied by his wife, Renukaji, travelled extensively through the country. During these travels, we met several important religious leaders; partook of food in several communal kitchens that were being run by religious entities all across India (in some of them, tens of thousands are fed every single day) and got a sense of how strongly religious India feels about the importance of ensuring that no one should ever be forced to sleep on an empty stomach in this great land of Dharma. Many of the religious leaders offered to give up all to ensure that a great annavrata is run throughout the country, or at least in some of the core centres of India, like ayodhya and Kashi.

Nothing significant came out of those offers. Though religious India was willing, there was little support from the rest of the establishment. Perhaps the issue required people of greater commitment and penance than us. But this journey through India with Mishraji was, for us, a journey of discovery. We came to know the country and the great mass of her ordinary people much more intimately. We also learnt about the knots in which the elite of India have tied themselves so thoroughly that they are unable to follow what they know to be a straight and righteous path. and most importantly, we came to know Mishraji, notwithstanding his awesome reputation as a diplomat and a politician, as a simple, god-fearing, faithful and committed Indian.

It was during this period that Mishraji first met Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham and became a devotee. His association with the acharya lasted till the end. Seeing this interaction between Mishraji and the Kanchi acharya, we also realised that being a devotee of an acharya means quite different things in the South and the North. Not that the devotion of either is less than the other; it is just that they have different ways of expressing and perhaps even conceptualising devotion. The acharya must have also been aware of this. Once he somewhat jestingly told me that the waters of the Kaveri and Ganga are very different. Those who drink from the Kaveri have quite a different mindset

from those who drink from the Ganga!

Rishi Kumar Mishra was a fine scholar and practitioner of politics and diplomacy. But what made him really great was the simplicity and directness of his faith and devotion. In the context of the nation, that simple faith and devotion expressed itself in the form of intense patriotism. His was not the patriotism of a scholar who has seen through the greatness of India; it was the simple patriotism of a son of the land. He would have loved India even if it had nothing of the great heritage that it does in fact have.

And this uncomplicated patriotism filled him with a sense of deep pain at the condition of the nation. He felt that we, the Indians of his time, were poor inheritors of this great civilisation, unable and unwilling to carry the burden of its greatness. While we were working together on the issue of food, I once asked him why the Indian elite was not concerned about such large-scale prevalence of hunger. He answered, somewhat acerbically, that there was no Indian elite, there was only an elite in India. I have never been able to forget that pithy remark. Only those who are committed to Indian civilisation, who feel duty-bound to protect this civilisation and her people, who are consumed by an intense urge to restore the glory of this great land and civilisation and are willing to give their all for this cause, may claim to be the Indian elite. Resourceful educated people without such an urge can only be termed as an elite group resident in India. That India did not have an Indian elite dedicated to the task of representing and rebuilding Indian civilisation and the Indian nation was an issue that constantly seemed to be on his mind. During my last meeting with him, he raised this once again. He seemed more concerned than usual. He said that even though we had been unable to build an Indian nation, we did build an Indian state and now even the state was proving to be hollow. Within India, the writ of Delhi did not run any more. And it was doubtful whether Delhi was capable of defending the borders of India. This he said in October last. I wonder what he would have said after seeing the Mumbai fiasco of November 2008. But I am sure if he had the energy, he would have stirred himself to make another great effort to contribute his best in ameliorating the Indian condition.

It seems that India does not produce men like Rishi Kumar Mishra any more. Delving deep into ancient literature, being well-versed in Indian knowledge systems, being concerned about India and her civilisation, caring about the state of India and her people—all these concerns seem to have become outdated in the India of today. People of the newer generations do not seem to be bothered about such matters. As people like Mishraji, who belonged to the pre-Independence generation, are leaving us their experiences and commitments are also disappearing from our public polity. We are not making men like him anymore. But, every civilisation needs knowledgeable and committed people who can forcefully represent the ancient truths in the modern context. How shall the India of today fill the vacuum left by the departure of men like Mishraji?

1 J. K. Bajaj and M. D. Srinivas, Annam Bahu Kurvita: Recalling the Indian Discipline of Growing and Sharing Food in Plenty, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai 1996.

2 J. K. Bajaj (ed.), Report of the Seminar on Food for all (august 1997), Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai 2001.

MISHRAJI AND US

Arvind P. Kudchadker

Life to me is a series of relationships, opportunities, coincidences, actions, responsibilities and accomplishments. With Mishraji, both Shanti and I had a special personal relationship that started in the middle of 2001. He always made us feel at home with his simplicity, openness, transparency, approach, deep thinking, and saintly manner. Just being with him one felt elevated by the 'vibrations'.

How and when did we meet Mishraji? How long did we know him? We were in the process of setting up the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DAIICT) at Gandhinagar, Gujarat, temporarily staying at the RIL Guest House and met up with Mishraji by chance. We interacted well and talked about ORF and its research activities as well as about DAIICT, its vision, philosophy, objectives, implementation strategy and its possible impact, as well as other issues connected with education. As a result, ORF and DAIICT worked together for some time on projects of mutual interest through our undergraduate students and faculty.

DAIICT is an interesting experiment in higher technical education with only a single specialization, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offering Bachelors, Masters and PhD, MS (IT) and MS (IT, Agri), with a modern curriculum in ICT and a strong HASS (Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences) programme. The major issues in higher education we discussed were: (i) large classes (240 in a class) (ii) single discipline institutions/universities (iii) effective model for distance technical education (extended class-room model) (iv) students' exposure to rural India (rural internship) (v) problem solving approach (active interaction with Reliance Infocom) and so on. These discussions were extremely useful in helping us develop the future course of DAIICT.

Mishraji visited DAIICT in 2003. He liked what had been created. The campus was well planned with innovative landscaping. It looked more like a beautiful garden in which academic activity is pursued - modern ICT amidst the abundance of nature. Mishraji loved nature in all its glory and often said that it was the best teacher and we needed to learn from it. He especially liked the following quotation from Prithvi Sukta that I regularly quote.

O Pure Earth, may that we utilize your soil well
For creative production
Without causing you injury or harm
And disturbing any vital element in you

PRITHVI SUKTA

He visited us again twice. Our relationship matured and we enjoyed his company and learnt a lot in the process. He was our friend, philosopher, and guide.

With Reliance Infocom, the industry—academia interaction that we talk about blossomed and a large number of students worked on industrial issues, using the

problem solving approach. He appreciated this approach as it produced highly skilled, 'practical' engineers with problem-solving ability, strong fundamentals in sciences, engineering sciences and HASS.

India is a country of numbers and poses unique challenges and opportunities. One major concern we have is of providing quality technical education to a very large number of young aspirants. We deliberated on our idea of experimenting with an 'extended classroom concept' through optimization of our faculty resource —both in-house as well as drawn from other reputed institutions—to reach large numbers of potential students all over Gujarat—'richness and reach'. How does one marry quality with quantity?

Mishraji was also concerned about 'teaching large classes' and its effectiveness. He felt that, since we will continue to face this challenge in India, it would be better to face it now and innovate. Through the use of modern technology like the Personalized Response System (PRS), a technology that has been extensively and effectively used for large classes at Berkeley, USA, as well as other universities, teaching and learning could be made more effective. Sound experimentation is the best way to learn, we both agreed.

During 2003 to 2005, while at DAIICT, we held a series of telephonic discussions on various issues, mostly connected with education, but especially concerning the lack of quality faculty, particularly in engineering institutions. Mishraji helped organize a seminar for the media about RIL's DAIICT experiment. He was pleased that DAIICT was a National Institute with full autonomy and, even more, that its intake was on an all-India basis. In return, he wanted me to participate in various discussions at the ORF and at Mumbai, something that I gladly did.

While in the US in the summer of 2005, I formed a small group of Faculty (NRIs) primarily from the US to debate two important and related issues: quality faculty and the number of PhDs in engineering from India and formalized it through the ORF, courtesy Mishraji. Continued discussions resulted in a project based at IIT Bombay on Engineering Education in India with Prof Rangan Banerjee, sponsored by the ORF. The report was well received and Mishraji suggested holding workshops/ seminars with distinguished professionals from government, the corporate world and academia to debate the recommendations. We held two such workshops, one in Mumbai and another in Delhi. He always encouraged working on critical issues for India and was willing to support these intellectually and financially.

In 2007, I was involved with setting-up a petroleum university at Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Once again I benefited from discussions with Mishraji about the global and Indian oil and gas scenario and the shortage of skilled people. Shanti and I visited the Mishras at Mumbai several times and enjoyed healthy, nourishing lunches with them. His health was failing and that was a great concern to us. However, he kept on working, trying to complete the last few chapters of his new book, meeting with several of us to discuss new issues in education, such as Science Education in India, ITIs and how to upgrade them to world standards through the PPP mode and so on.

Mishraji's interests spread well beyond education and also to healthcare. During this period our older daughter Anjali and her husband Milind were fortunate to meet and interact with Renukaji and Mishraji at Manhattan, NY. They were invited to visit ORF and talk to ORF scientists on 'memory' and 'biomedical engineering',

more specifically on the hand-held confocal microscope that Milind has developed for detection of skin and oral cancers. They too soon developed excellent rapport with the wonderful Mishras.

We knew Mishraji for just about eight years, but it feels like we knew him for a very long time. His impact made our lives richer, and more interesting and exciting.

PUBLIC POLICY

RK-THE PRIVATELY PUBLIC AND SIMPLY COMPLEX GENTLEMAN

Falguni Sen

It is difficult to write about some people when they are no longer with us. RK, for instance. In part, this is because he was in some ways larger than life and it all seems like a temporary ^ absence and partly because I saw him as a very private person not interested in a public discourse about him. My head is still full of conversations and arguments about the direction of India's relationship with the United States and China. (As recently as the first week of January this year we talked about the role of Kashmir in the new US administration's India policy and the possibilities for a trust-based relationship with China). There are conversations that I feel we need to complete, and arguments I need to still convince him of. At the same time I am not sure that he would like a public discussion of the incredible insights and intuitions he had about people, policies and politics.

I am a recent addition to RK's network. My association with him started in early 2003 when he came to New York for some medical attention. I had heard of him from friends as a person with a "mind like a nuclear reactor" (capable of chain reactions!) and a network whose footprint "covered the entire earth and all political persuasions". He was the "person to go to" if you wanted to get things implemented. What a perfect person heading a new think tank, I thought, since most think tanks generate discourse but rarely succeed in their prime directive to see that good policies are indeed implemented.

My first few meetings were very memorable. We talked of all things to do with India. The new ORF building had just been commissioned and he was very proud of every detail. "We have the building", he said, "let us now make it into a world class think tank". His quiet determination showed and I knew that he would build something extraordinary.

Here was RK in New York for medical treatment but his mind was active and keen on making use of every minute that he was in the city. We rarely discussed his health. "They are taking care of it", he would say. Later on I realized that he used the same multi-perspective approach to his health that he did in his intellectual pursuits. Western medicine was good but needed the overlay of traditional Indian medicine and spiritual healing. It was not a question of "either/or" with him. It was an issue of levels and layers and possibilities of integration.

"What is different about globalization of Indian firms?" he would ask. Can we develop a unique model to show how we are different? As I continued this discussion I suddenly found myself committing to work on specific issues and themes to justify my arguments. Short idea papers leading to larger projects leading to "now let us build something". I have to admit that I had initially no desire to move into these areas of activity. I was, after all, a contented professor and researcher in a US university's business school! In retrospect, I have often wondered whether he had planned it all along, realizing that I would not leave an incomplete argument alone. All he had to do was to convince me that my

argument was incomplete—the rest took care of itself.

He had a sharp understanding of what really motivated people. Most of it was intuitive and drew on an extraordinary power of observation and a deep insight into human behaviour. He wanted people to act. In his own way I feel that RK was actually an activist. When I disagreed with him on some things happening in India, he would say: "This is the ground reality, so how are you engaging in that reality". He wanted academics in particular to engage the real world and not just create a discourse amongst like-minded individuals. He wanted his think tank to provide just such an opportunity. "Research is critical," he would say, "it provides objective legitimacy". But he wanted this research to actually influence policy-makers and was open to multiple ways of communicating and eventually achieving this.

At another time he asked, "What can we learn from the US that can be applied to India?" Should we do a study on NAFTA to see how we can develop SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement)? This was way back in 2003. How about the education system? What can we learn from that? Why don't we draw up a list of research projects and commission them?

All of a sudden I would once again find myself writing small idea papers and sometimes even more comprehensive proposals on specific topics. If he liked the idea, he would say, "So do it". I would, of course, be flabbergasted and inquire just what was to be done. He would say, "Just implement it". That is how we started the ORF-US network of academics to identify projects of common interest that would help understand a uniquely globalizing India and simultaneously internationalize the intellectual atmosphere at ORF.

A similar story can be told of my involvement with ORF's healthcare venture. During a casual conversation in New York in 2006, he asked me what I was currently working on. I told him that I was working on the pharmaceutical industry and on the issue of the outsourcing of drug discovery to India. Of course he knew someone I should meet, who was his dear old friend and was starting his own drug company in the United States. In a few days I found myself organizing a major event on US-India partnerships in the field of drug discovery and generics in New York. I still wonder how it all happened and so fast. RK, of course, was happy with the direction and just disappeared into the background. All he said to me was, "If there is any difficulty, let me know". In retrospect, he saw to it that there was "no difficulty", but I was not even aware of it. The event led to occasional comments and idea papers on issues related to healthcare policy in India. Soon I found myself more and more involved in building a healthcare policy within ORF.

Superlatives came easily to RK. He would often introduce people as "most brilliant". I have rarely found a leader so secure in what he is and what he does that he feels no urge to be competitive with people who work with him. This allowed him to nudge people in the direction he wanted them to go and then step back and facilitate things when necessary. He knew that, in the final analysis, he was in charge and could call the shots. And he sure did, whenever he felt it was warranted.

RK was also a very generous man, though I have yet to figure out his attitude towards money. There were times when money seemed no object. All that mattered was that the job had to be done and done well. At other times he would

not part with a penny. I feel that in the final analysis it all boiled down to trust. If he trusted someone to do their best to work for the organization, he would have no problem in supporting them with whatever they needed. If they had not yet convinced him of their intent and ability to deliver, then no matter what, he would not part with resources easily. He would rather trust and be disappointed than work in an environment where he had to keep a constant watch. He was the leader and set the tone and he was very aware of it. He wanted agreement on a vision. Either he convinced you of his vision or you convinced him of yours. Trust and an agreement on vision is what he wanted from people around him. He would then just facilitate.

RK could listen to anybody with rapt attention and talk to people within "their paradigm". It would be difficult to make out if he really agreed with you. I have not met anyone with such a diverse group of friends from different political and strongly held ideological positions, all of them feeling that there were some essential values that he agreed with them on. This was his strength in creating multi-stakeholder panels where somehow he could identify a common programme that everyone shared and then create an action plan based on that common programme.

RK believed that people were multi-faceted. He wanted to bring out all the different aspects within them. He knew that I had taught in a Chinese business programme and had many views on business-to-business India-China relationships. Very soon I found myself writing a business plan for an India-China centre in Kolkata and then being asked to "take it forward" (an oft used RK phrase whose complexity I have only begun to decipher!). "How is your mother?" he added knowing fully well that a project in Kolkata where my aging mother lived would be very attractive to me. Of course, I accepted the challenge!

These are the musings of a neophyte in RK's network. As I end these ruminations, RK's smile flashes onto my mind. It was enigmatic to say the least. Was it approval of my strong positions, I wonder? Maybe an acknowledgement that the arguments we just had did not matter! Or was it his satisfaction, that without my knowing, he had indeed achieved what he had wanted all along! There was insight, understanding, and playfulness, all combined in the goodbye as he saw me to the door with expectations of new beginnings.

PUBLIC POLICY

MISHRAJI, MY FRIEND

Vikram Sood

There are some people who mean everything to some people and something special to everybody. Such people have the God-given gift of being able to understand and empathise with everyone they meet. They have the special gift of touching every person they meet, however briefly, in a unique, special way.

Mishraji was one such person who did not leave anyone he met untouched by his personality. He could focus on the smallest detail even while discussing large issues. I recollect that he always remembered that I preferred my coffee without milk even as we discussed the future of Pakistan and our neighbourhood, or on those rare occasions when he hoped I would be able to understand the spiritual meaning of life. We would sit for hours in his office undisturbed as we went through our unhurried lunch and his mind would roam free. Knowing Mishraji was like going on a long, exciting journey and discovering new things as one journeyed along. And the discovery would come little by little.

His transition from pure journalism to politics was easy and possibly natural when he found himself a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1974, at the young age of 42. It was this that perhaps brought him into close association with Indira Gandhi and later Rajiv Gandhi and it was his ability to think beyond the confines of party ideology and politics that also made Mishraji a close confidante of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

He was a visionary whose feet were grounded in reality. So while he dreamt for our country's future and the role future generations would play, he was no day dreamer. When he talked everything looked so simple and so achievable; now that he has gone, it all looks so difficult. As Longfellow said, "When a great man dies, for years the light he leaves behind him, lies on the paths of men." We take solace and hope from those words.

I got to know Mishraji a decade back when he was quite an enigma for many; not because he was mysterious, but just that there were so many facets and depths to his personality. It was at a time when he was playing an important and historical role in India-Pakistan relations. Yet, apart from a few chosen persons, he would never discuss the matter with any one. His knowledge about Indian politics was more than matched by his deep knowledge of Hindu philosophy.

More than his career, which took him from journalism to being a Member of Parliament, or in to the corporate world and eventually to leading the Observer Research Foundation, it was the depth and breadth of his knowledge that was amazing. Among the wide circle of his friends, both in India and outside were politicians across the ideological spectrum, eminent journalists who would gladly break bread with him, corporate executives and senior bureaucrats, philosophers and academics. He could be discussing philosophy in the morning, internal politics in the afternoon, external security concerns in the evening and corporate strategy over dinner—all with equal ease and authority. In all this, he found the time and the energy to author some of the most valuable books on Hindu philosophy, the Vedas and the Upanishads; the latest published work being, *"The*

Ultimate Dialogue".

At the Observer Research Foundation, he endeavoured to combine the wisdom and experience of age with the exuberance and talent of the young, for he knew that the future belonged to the young. He knew that unless the young were involved in and were themselves convinced of this great expedition of re-ordering and shaping India's future, the vision that he had would not materialise. His contribution to this is his legacy.

Mishraji was a quiet man; never given to extreme emotions nor ever likely to raise his voice. He was also a private person. For a long time he knew that I knew that he was ailing, yet he never told me and I never asked. Only once during our last meeting in December in Mumbai did he say, 'Now I am tired'. The saddest part of a long and enduring friendship or of any relationship is when you realise that your friend is going to leave you. Little did I know that this was our last meeting, hoping always that by not thinking about it, it would not happen.

Mishraji was a man who felt he still had so much more to accomplish, but he also knew that time was running out for him. Yet he was not the one to give in easily. And standing behind him was his gentle wife, Renukaji. God won in the end and, as always, we lost. We still grieve his departure and when we do that we really grieve for ourselves.

PUBLIC POLICY

REVISITING MY CONVERSATIONS WITH MISHRAJI

Rakesh Basant

I met Mishraji in the middle of 2006 when I was exploring the idea of spending some time in Delhi. He told me that I could define my own work agenda and also help ORF define its policy research agenda, especially in the area of Economy and Development. He was not unduly concerned about the lack of clarity regarding my role during my tenure at ORF. In fact, he gave me the impression that he knew what I might be able to do. I enjoy interacting with people who are not perturbed by ambiguities and even more with those who are quite comfortable in such situations. And Mishraji was one of them. Given his 'sense of clarity' about my role, I decided to join ORF despite the advice not to do so from several friends and acquaintances. And I never regretted that decision, even though my research productivity during my tenure at ORF was not very high. Over time, through my interaction, I found him to be very forthright and clear about what needed to be done. I too was always very candid about my views with respect to ORF related issues. His growing confidence in me was reassuring and frightening at the same time. He responded to my criticisms with amazing ease and my growing respect and fondness for him resulted in my getting sucked into the 'ORF system' much more than I had either imagined or planned to do.

The bulk of my interactions with him revolved around making ORF a world class policy think-tank. These consisted of long e-mail interactions and one-to-one discussions and several very cryptic telephone conversations. The telephone conversations were typically preceded by messages from Jayan that "Mishraji would like to talk at a convenient time". And I now realize that I had become quite used to this sequence and miss it at times. In what follows, I make an effort to summarize these discussions. It is inevitable that in doing so some selectivity would creep in vis-a-vis the issues that get included and my own biases may impair the summarization process. While I cannot do much to enhance the objectivity of the discussion below, I am quite convinced that we covered a wide a variety of issues that are relevant for a policy think-tank in general, although our discussions were usually in the context of the ORF.

I realized quite early during my interactions with Mishraji that he was keen on making ORF a 'world-class' policy think- tank. ORF had done, but he wanted it to do much better; he had a vision of a different entity and was in a hurry. Many social science researchers like me, located in universities and research institutions, have some illusions of providing useful insights on policy choices. But how are these institutions different from a policy think-tank? The *manager* in Mishraji favoured the notion that there should be deliverables -that a think-tank should *impact* policy and that its ability to *change* policy is a key measure of its success, even as the *academic* in Mishraji was willing to agree that such a notion was difficult to implement. While social scientists in general may typically not have an 'objective function' to *change* policy which a researcher in a policy think-tank should have, impacting policy was a complex exercise. He was acutely aware of the idiosyncratic processes of policy making in India. 'Nobody knows how policies are made here', he would say with a smile and a twinkle in his eye, which convinced me that he knew more than what he was willing to share! He repeatedly argued that a western model of a think-tank would be inappropriate as

the nature of lobbying and the bureaucracy is very different here. Unfortunately, we never got down to discussing this issue in any detail.

Nevertheless, the *academic* in him also realized that given the problems of attribution, it is difficult to figure out whether an organization like ORF was actually solely or even primarily instrumental in effecting policy change. At a broader level, then, a think-tank can strive to work on issues of policy relevance—immediate, short-term and long term—and participate (effectively) in the policy-making process and in the policy dialogue. Thus, while impacting policy remains at the core, given the problems of measuring efficacy, one can at best only strive for ORF work being seriously considered in policy forums. Besides, ORF could also provide an independent platform for serious policy related discussions.

One of the concerns that he often shared with me was that work at ORF was not leading to any 'synergistic' impact on the policy dialogue in India. Was it that 'researchers at the ORF did not sufficiently talk to each other'? How does one facilitate that? At one time, he was convinced that we should try and build the research at the ORF around a single theme, but we soon realized that such a theme would be too broad to be analytically meaningful for designing research and in terms of policy relevance. The discussion then moved to the idea of identifying a set of themes that could be used to derive coherence and create an organizational focus along with a niche for the ORF in the policy domain. We were reasonably convinced that if the researchers at the think-tank were drawn from different disciplinary backgrounds, appropriate themes could help integrate work across disciplinary areas. But this is easier said than done: disciplinary boundaries are difficult to cross and one knows of few think tanks that have managed to achieve this. At the same time, the think tank needs to be flexible to accommodate key emerging policy options and be opportunistic to attract good researchers and exploit opportunities to work with policy-makers. In any case a periodic review of research themes seems desirable.

Pre-decided themes can help in making choices about research projects. However, if an interesting research project for which we get human and other resources is "outside" the thematic area, the institution should probably be flexible enough to entertain it. The danger, of course, is that if one entertains too many such requests, the organization may lose focus. The challenge is to create an optimal balance of organizational flexibility and focus, as both are important in a think-tank. Another way of handling diversity in research themes and creating some amount of flexibility in the research focus could be to encourage researchers to pursue their own research interests for a part of the time. But how much time is desirable for such 'non-theme' work still needs to be thought through.

The evolution and growth of ORF has been through centres and groups within these centres. Is this the right structure or do such boundaries reduce the potential of doing work of policy relevance? Insofar as policy research in specific areas would require researchers from specific disciplinary backgrounds to sharply focus on specific areas in order to exploit specialization advantages, the existence of centres may be desirable. And, equally, one may need to have groups within a centre for specialized areas. At the same time, as such boundaries get defined (if not codified) collaborative work may suffer as researchers tend to work in silos. This was pretty much the case at ORF. But the solution was not so straightforward. In order to attract good researchers, one requires a reasonable number of persons in their respective disciplines for interaction. The existence of

a 'critical mass' of researchers in an area may be desirable for good output unless the researchers are able to build 'external' networks for intensive interaction. In any case, the presence of a few in-house persons with similar backgrounds is useful to build teams and capacity, despite the likelihood of creating disciplinary boundaries, if not silos, that may hamper useful policy research. Thus, creation of groups/ centers that are dominated by specific disciplines has both advantages as well as disadvantages. One option to overcome these disadvantages is to create inter-disciplinary teams for each group. This, however, may increase the size of the think-tank dramatically and thus may neither be feasible nor desirable. The other option is to create avenues for collaborative work across groups. One way of doing this is to identify thematic areas (see discussion above) that need to be focused upon and to create 'projects' in which people from different groups can work together. We often talked about choosing themes that have implications for different governance issues and build projects around them. One such theme is related to the role of federalism, since the specifics of the federal structure have implications for governance/regulation in a variety of sectors - education, health, agriculture, even WTO. Mishraji was very keen to build projects around issues of federalism.

The implementation of research themes, especially those that cut across disciplinary areas would require an organizational structure that can appropriately review proposals, evaluate output and so on. Should one create task forces for specific inter-disciplinary projects? As a researcher who has enjoyed the luxury of setting up my own research agenda, I often insisted that research themes should emerge from within, even as the process of developing these themes can be facilitated by a set of 'outsiders' as research advisors. This is how the idea of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) emerged. The manager in Mishraji felt that the RAC can formulate the agenda that subsequently gets implemented, but the academic in him was persuaded that any structure that one creates for identifying research areas and the evaluation of project inputs and outputs should not reduce the autonomy of each group. Consequently it was decided that the RAC would provide broad research directions and that these directions would take into account the capacities and interests of researchers at ORF. Though initially the RAC may need to be more pro-active, eventually the freedom of each group to choose research themes should not be curbed too much, ensuring at the same time some quality standards (and broad coherence). This would require transparent and generally acceptable norms for peer review of inputs (e.g., proposals) and output (e.g., papers, policy briefs). In practice, if one has one senior person leading each segment of the research portfolio of the think-tank, s/he can be asked to put together proposals from people working with her/him. These proposals can be discussed internally through some type of inter-group evaluation process and then sent to external reviewers. External evaluation may be restricted to 'large projects'. Inter-group interaction and some external inputs may help fine-tune projects and explore linkages across projects, segments and groups (centres).

In the context of ORF, the issue of the review of research was discussed at length and on several occasions, as Mishraji was convinced about ensuring quality at all levels and here the views of the *manager* and the *academic* in him converged. We agreed that the researchers should buy into the process. The following process made sense. A research proposal can be prepared by the researchers in consultation with the group/ centre heads. A panel of referees for different areas may be created who will either review the proposals themselves or suggest names of others for the purpose. The group/centre head can also

suggest names, but one needs to keep the review quite independent. The research advisory committee members can also be roped in for proposal reviews (especially large ones) and they too can suggest names of others. The proposal, along with the comments of the referee, can be reviewed by a committee consisting of centre heads and nominees from the Board. The committee can invite members of the research advisory committee or others if they feel that their inputs on specific projects can be useful. The review of output can also follow a similar process—internal review followed by an external evaluation.

The issue of organizational structure is very complex as an effective policy think-tank requires a large variety of human resources. ORF so far has not systematically thought about the nature of human resources that it needs. Most of the time hiring has been opportunistic. One needs to have, for want of any other word, *Advisors*, well-known individuals (senior officials, policy-makers, researchers) who are 'in the know' of things. These persons have personal experience of policy- making and implementation, are perceptive about emerging policy issues and have access to high quality network capital. These persons can provide interesting insights on issues for research, open doors for information, funds and audience with the right set of people.

And then one will need *Researchers*, well trained persons who will undertake research at the think-tank. The senior researchers would identify research topics, lead projects and would be responsible for delivery and quality. Researchers can come from different backgrounds and it may be useful to have a group that consists of hard-core researchers, policy analysts, journalists and bureaucrats. Mishraji was quite 'impatient' with pure academic researchers, 'They take a lot of time and often do not come up with anything implementable', he would say. Irrespective of the composition of the group, he was increasingly convinced that some amount of specialization is desirable to ensure good quality of work.[1] Researchers (and even advisors) can be located in different groups or centres within the think-tank. If centres and groups are formed, one may require persons with good research experience to head centres/groups and projects that cut across centres and/or groups. Researchers should be encouraged to be associated with one or more research theme. Ideally, one should aim for a situation where researchers may work in research themes within a centre as well as across centres. Only then will some synergies result.

Does a think tank need a Director or a CEO? My bias was in favour of a researcher heading the institution as a Director while Mishraji often felt that a think-tank needs a CEO as the work of a think tank needs to be 'managed and communicated' well (see discussion below). The manager in him usually dominated here and he seemed convinced that a person with a corporate background would be appropriate for this position. Eventually, we concurred that if one goes for a CEO, s/he can be the administrative head across centres; s/he can partly perform the role of a research manager but, essentially, it should be a managerial position. Since both of us were convinced that one should have senior experienced persons heading the centres, a flat structure with centre heads on par with the CEO may be desirable, except that the latter may have a larger administrative role. I am not too sure, but I think Mishraji was not fully convinced that an experienced researcher should always head the centres. He thought the person should be 'right'; one with a broad policy perspective and an ability to understand and value good research. He, however, admitted that 'the problem always was to find such a person!'

The think tank should have a Board of Governors with senior researchers, policy-makers and other stake-holders like industry representatives. We often spoke about enlarging the membership of the Board of Trustees of ORF and discussed the idea that the Director/CEO should be part of the Board along with two other center heads who could join the Board on a rotation basis. Initially, the idea was that a sub-group of the Board could provide advice on the broad research portfolio of the think-tank or act as a Research Advisory Committee. Subsequently, it was felt that the functions of the Board should not overlap with those of the Research Advisory Committee and the latter should be an independent entity although there could be overlapping membership.

The discussion on linkages with other think tanks took place on several occasions, as there were several opportunities to build links with other think tanks. While the overall approach was positive, our common concern was that ORF should not lapse into performing a secondary role, far less that of the 'funder, a research assistant or one which opens doors for outside entities'. The linkages needed to be forged from a position of strength and that would automatically happen if we managed good quality output.

We both felt strongly that linkages with the government should be kept at an arms-length. One should be willing to take up projects for government provided they were interesting for the think tank and specified well-defined objectives.

Though regular funding from the government may reduce autonomy, there are instances where funding and independence (autonomy) co-exist. Equally, since the focus of the think- tank research is policy, one needed to engage government in some way or the other, though it is not entirely clear how the efficacy of such interaction could be ensured. Participation in seminars/meetings was obviously an option. One could also explore the possibility of involving government functionaries for project reviews and evaluations. Special presentations could also be made for a select group of policy makers on themes on which ORF has done work.

Given the links of ORF with Reliance Industries, the issue of linkages with the corporate sector regularly cropped up in our conversations. It was obvious to us that the independence of views and autonomy of researchers needed to be ensured. Once this is done, a think tank should have an interface with the corporates, both for funding as well as for dissemination. And if we can convince our affiliates of certain policy options, industry bodies can well lobby for such options as well. How actual policies are made is anybody's guess but links with corporates can definitely facilitate the interface with the government as well.

The other way to enhance this interface was to focus on themes where the corporate sector could play an important role. Public-private partnerships are an obvious choice for research across different areas. One can also think of other themes where the corporate sector would be interested. So long as the research is not linked to individual corporate entities and the research questions/ answers are not governed by them, one should be able retain our integrity and independence. In general, broad research programmes rather than projects should be funded by corporates. Ideally, they should fund the think-tank corpus but that may be difficult to implement.

Another area of concern was regional centres. Given the fact that ORF had

regional centres in Mumbai and Chennai and was trying to set-up one in Kolkata, this issue periodically came up as only the Delhi centre was really active. Mishraji would say that 'Policy-making as well as policy research should not be Delhi-centric' and that regional centres of ORF needed to be seen in that larger perspective. Such an arrangement also had other advantages. Since it is difficult to attract good researchers these days, centres/research themes can be distributed across space, that is, people can be working in different regional chapters but contributing to research for the think-tank as a whole. The next obvious question was around the autonomy of such centres. Would, for instance, enhanced autonomy add to the creation of new boundaries that would hamper reaping of synergies? Our broad consensus was that while some autonomy is desirable, ideally research in chapters should not be completely independent of the overall research agenda of the think-tank. One way of doing it could be by assigning each researcher, whether in HQ or chapters, to a research theme. Only then could synergies be reaped. Similarly, research proposals from the chapters should go through the same kind of review as the proposals from the HQ. Of course, one needed to be flexible about implementing a research programme so that good intellectual resources could be attracted across geographical space. A regional spread could also make research more relevant as one could focus on regional issues as well. Besides, there could be activities (other than research) that were specific to a centre/HQ.

On issues of branding and outreach the manager in Mishraji was always dominant. He was, of course, convinced that the first target should be to produce some very good quality research and create "products" that could attract attention. The outreach strategy could only be built around good products and good people. Broadly, a think-tank like ORF needs to be known as an independent policy research entity which exploits synergies across academic and policy research disciplines. But Mishraji unlike most academics seemed convinced that good products also require good marketing and therefore a research culture needs to be combined with a managerial culture at a policy think-tank. Moreover, since good academics may not be—actually rarely are—good marketers, one needs corporate expertise to perform that task.

As with corporate links, the issue of diversification of funding also came up time and again as the pros and cons of funding from Reliance Industries were repeatedly discussed. I must clarify that during my tenure at ORF I did not come across any instance where the funders tried to influence either research agenda or the output. In fact, Mishraji felt that such support had actually enhanced ORF's autonomy. But both of us were convinced that the think-tank also needs to be 'seen' as independent and autonomous and therefore diversity of funding is desirable. Not only should researchers be encouraged to seek outside funding for research projects, fund raising for the corpus from corporates and foundations should also be looked at systematically once the think-tank has a sharply focused research agenda.

It is difficult to encompass in a note like this the variety of issues that we discussed during my short association with Mishraji. One of my most interesting discussions with him related to the different 'levels' at which a human being operates—not one of these 'levels' captures the essence in its entirety. For some reason he used the world 'level' and not 'dimension', although the distinction is not yet clear to me. I have been telling him about the diversity among different communities that we see around us and he spoke of diversity within a person—with different dimensions becoming relevant at different times. And it was clear to

me that the *manager* and the *academic* in him were two of the many 'levels' that he straddled.

Looking back I find it amazing that a person of Mishraji's stature spent so much time and energy interacting with a person like me, whom he hardly knew and who often disagreed with him! When I joined the ORF, he told me that he has a 'bad habit' (*buri aadat* was the term he used) of involving people around him in a large number of things and I should say 'no' if I do not wish to be involved. He also said that my responses would not affect our relationship. And I did say 'no', not once but several times. To his credit, he never tried to persuade me to change my mind. In this entire process our relationship actually got strengthened as I realized that he has the patience to deal with a person like me and he probably found my candidness (and stubbornness) amusing. Despite the age difference and the obvious 'experience deficit' that I had, he always treated me as an equal. I always enjoyed my interactions with him and miss them.

[1] *My own bias has been that policy advice should be backed by rigorous data-analysis and we need in-house expertise to undertake such analysis. To take this further, it was decided to initiate a data-base project at ORF initially to capture economic data but subsequently to include other data as well.*

THE MAN, HIS MISSION AND HIS MESSAGE

S.D. Muni

One rarely comes across a person of as varied and diverse dimensions as the late R.K. Mishra. The level of ideological comfort that he enjoyed with the left as well as the right puzzled people about his real position. In response to this puzzle, he would often quote Mrs. Indira Gandhi, "I am neither left nor right but upright". While being a staunch Hindu by belief and faith, he was uncompromisingly secular in his thoughts and action. He was a journalist, an intellectual, a social activist, a political strategist, a diplomatic negotiator, an institution builder and a corporate visionary, all rolled into one. He was a passionate nationalist without being a chauvinist. I first met him in Jaipur, Rajasthan, during the late sixties, in Niros restaurant over a cup of coffee with some other friends. I was registered as a Ph.D. student at the Department of Political Science through its South Asian Studies unit as a private candidate, while still teaching in a local secondary school. "Mishraji", as I came to call him subsequently, was actively involved in the university affairs and had raised the question of foreign funding to the South Asian Studies Centre. His objection was to the suspected CIA funding for the Asia Foundation, which was also supporting South Asian Studies in Rajasthan University. Though I subsequently received a fellowship from that Centre, I endorsed his campaign. Those were the days of considerable resentment in India against US activities. His objection was not about developing South Asian Studies but about accepting "tainted' funds.

He always wanted India to rise as a great power on its own strength and capabilities. This drove him to mobilize an intellectual and a policy response to India's economic crisis in 1990. The idea of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) was born as a result of this drive. Under this umbrella, he brought together India's leading economists like I.G. Patel, R.N. Malhotra, Manmohan Singh and M. Narsimhan, left leaders like Jyoti Basu and a group of Indian industrialists to ensure that India came out of the economic crisis it was in at the time. Analysts and scholars have credited Manmohan Singh's economic reforms with taking India out of the crisis of 1990, but Mishraji's initiative undoubtedly played a critical role. As India emerged as an economic power house by the beginning of the new millennium, he wanted India to be recognized and respected as such. The idea of the ORF launching a Journal and a global TV platform to project India's achievements and challenges was relentlessly pursued by him even in his days of physical infirmity.

In Mishraji's scheme of things, economic strength was an important component of India emerging as a big power, but it was not all. India had to release its political energies for playing a meaningful role at the global level in political and strategic spheres and for this it had to overcome its internal and external conflicts. Conflicts and tensions within India and its neighbourhood had to be resolved, or at least softened, in this respect. He encouraged neighbourhood studies at the ORF. The emphasis on Sri Lanka at the Chennai Chapter was a clear manifestation of this. On Nepal, when no one in India, either at the governmental level or among the political leaders, was willing to meet the Maoist leaders, he was willing to explore ways and means to get them in touch with the foreign minister. The King's takeover of direct power in Nepal in February 2005 so agitated him that he

insisted we organize a panel discussion on the evolving situation. To make the meeting and the discussions provocative, he titled it "Are we witnessing the end of Monarchy in Nepal?" How prophetic he was. The ORF also hosted the Maoist leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai when they visited India after the victory of the April 2006 peoples' movement (*Jan Andolan-II*) for the Hindustan Times Conclave, though the Maoists were still an officially unrecognized political force in India.

China fascinated him both for its mystique and the challenge it posed. He advocated constructive engagement with China and tasked the ORF to evolve ways and means to help India do so. The Chennai Chapter was assigned the task of monitoring Chinese developments through Chinese sources. Studies of India-China economic engagement were commissioned in New Delhi as well. He was keen on establishing a full fledged Centre of Chinese Studies in Kolkata and this idea was launched in a seminar organized in Kolkata in collaboration with Calcutta University. The theme of the conference was "India and China: The Next Decade" and the spread of participants from outside the ORF included Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee, Former National Security Council Adviser Brajesh Mishra, CPI Leader A.B. Bardhan and CPM leader Nilotpal Basu. His own introductory remarks underlined the fact that both India and China have a lot to learn from each other and that the two together will define the destiny of not only Asia, but the whole world.

Within the broad parameters of the neighbourhood, Mishraji knew that the most sensitive and difficult question was of Pakistan. Accordingly, he committed himself to helping India resolve its conflict with Pakistan and in Kashmir. He was appalled by the lack of proper study and thinking in India on the Pakistan question. In the course of his Track-II engagement as Prime Minister Vajpayee's envoy for parleys with Pakistan, he realized that India needed a dispassionate understanding of Pakistan as a political entity. I remember his writing to me in 1998-99 when I was in Laos to draft an outline of a 'think-tank' on Pakistan studies. He also pleaded with the government to support such a venture. It was decided at the National Security Council level to set up a Centre of Pakistan Studies, though the Centre has yet to take shape. At his level, however, Mishraji built a strong unit for Pakistan studies within the ORF. He also paid considerable attention to getting the Kashmir issue resolved, not only by encouraging studies on various aspects of the problem, including the plight of the Kashmiri Pundits, but also by facilitating a dialogue between the extremist Hurriyat leaders and the Government of India.

The ORF also became a principal instrument when he took up the task of realizing Dhirubhai Ambani's dream of creating an Indian "Brookings Institute". While he welcomed ideas from all possible sources, he refused any financial help from any one foreign source in building the ORF. It so turned out that there was no need for him to do so since even the "Brookings" was seeking help from the Ambani group to come out of its own financial mess. Soon he realized that "Brookings" was not really sincere in collaborating on research programmes with the ORF. So to assert the ideological and intellectual independence of ORF, he also forged a collaboration with the leftist Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of Germany. This upset many of the other rightist German foundations like the Konraad-Adenauer and Fredrich-Ebert, which were more liberal in their funding proposals. But that did not matter; it was not the money, but the matter that moved Mishraji.

The ORF emerged as a new concept, a new brand of 'public policy think-tank' in

India, supported by the industrial house of the Ambanis, but claiming to be completely independent in its research. Indian business houses have so far shied away from investing in intellectual property of 'think tanks', as they do not directly add to the cash register. Mishraji wanted to rope in other business houses in to the ORF fold, not so much to collect funds, for which Reliance had, in any case, given him a blank cheque, but to instil a culture of building business futures on the basis of rational policy choices. He mooted the idea of an ORF Business Council to institutionalise the interaction of intellect and interests. He was attempting to find a concrete synergy between "knowledge and action" which he saw reflected in the Gita while writing his *The Ultimate Dialogue (Rupa, 2007)*. Some business leaders did come forward in response to his initiatives, but not much success could be achieved because the mindset of the business houses is still generally conservative and parochial, hesitant about backing bold ideas and taking creative risks.

Mishraji nurtured ORF as a family. An affectionate and warm-hearted mentor, he was always willing to accommodate specific problems and pressures of its faculty and staff members. When the chips were down, he valued commitment and competence and abhorred lack of professional integrity and honesty. I recall his insistence that the ORF provide a residence for me in Delhi so that I could avoid the waste of time and effort involved in commuting from Gurgaon. His offer was much too generous for me to accept. To dissuade me from leaving ORF, he said; "There is no tradition of divorce in Rajasthan where *Sati-pratha* has been prevalent; we live and die with each other". He took people at face value and trusted them easily and instantaneously, even if this sometimes proved costly to him, both emotionally and institutionally.

PUBLIC POLICY

UNCLE AND HIS DREAM

Wilson John

It was his dream I was to share with him that took me to Mr. Rishi Kumar Mishra. As is wont with men of stature, he was variously called RK, Mishraji and Panditji. I came to call him Chairman in public and 'Uncle', of all things, in private. The dream was the Observer Research Foundation, which he had founded and shared the nurturing with countless others. I was lucky to be one among them from its infancy.

I had only vaguely heard about him and had never met him before that call one summer afternoon in 2002. A beautiful voice informed me that Mr R.K. Mishra of the Observer Research Foundation would like to speak to me. Then came a gruff voice, "Wilson, I am R.K. Mishra. I have read your pieces on Pakistan. Can you meet me at 4 pm tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir," I blurted out, as if to a command, and that was that. The call ended, leaving me totally at a loss. I was clueless about the caller and hadn't even asked where I should meet him. I frantically called up my friends and came to know that Mr Mishra was the Chairman of the ORF, and had an office in the Vijaya Bank Building on Barakhamba Road.

That he would offer me a job had not even occurred to me. I was just curious to meet him and know why he was taking the trouble to meet me, an out-of-work journalist who wrote infrequently on Pakistan; there were others who wrote better and with greater frequency. In any case, there are dime- a-dozen Pakistan 'experts' and I was way down the rung. A random Google search revealed Mr Mishra's deep interest and involvement in the affairs of that troubled and troubling neighbour nation. He was a master and I was not even a good student of the subject that brought me to his 14th floor office, reached by a highly unreliable lift or a long flight of stairs. A mountain lover, I chose to trek up the steps. It was to be a short meeting. He let me know, rather brusquely, that he already knew my background and had read my pieces on Pakistan. He asked me what I was doing at the moment and what I would like to do in the future. I saw no reason for a guarded reply. Impulsively, I told him that, given the freedom, I would like to spend the rest of my life roaming the mountains. It was my passion, my chosen field of adventure. He looked at me for a long moment, relaxed and eased back on his leather chair. Behind him, I could see the jagged steeples of high-rises that crowded the skyline of the once-regal Connaught Place. I also spotted the sprawling cotton tree, which rose from the parking lot behind the Hindustan Times building and remembered the blazing red flowers the tree showed off every spring. I had worked with HT for over a dozen years ...a long time ago when journalists were paid a pittance and survived on the airy opium of ideology and the very down to ground pleasure of 'band-makhan' (bun and butter) washed down with cups of tea at a tiny shack outside Scindia House.

"I will offer you an adventure," he said, with a ghost of a smile, his voice bringing me back to the room. "Why don't you work with me on Pakistan". Without giving me a chance to reply, he went on: "Give me some proposals on Pakistan and work on them. Come next week, fix the time with my secretary". The meeting was

over. I was left nonplussed, much like a paraglider landing with a bump on unknown territory.

I worked hard for the next two weeks, focussing on two proposals I was keen on and submitted them for his approval, which he did without much delay. He called me to his office, discussed the proposals and then, without so much as an 'if you please', he set me another impossible deadline to finish the task. He then passed me on to Mr Arun Mehra, the ORF vice president, to give me a conducted tour of the new, ORF building on Rouse Avenue.

It was a revelation for me. The construction work was almost complete and only the interiors remained to be given the finishing touches. I could see the care and thought which had gone into designing the building. From the debris of rock and sand rose high in to the sky a vision concretised, an architectural flower of dream like delicacy and yet with the power and strength of purpose and determination. Later was to come the manicured, sun kissed garden all around, through which you walked to enter the reception room—an atrium of ideas and dreams, a triangle of glass and concrete which held light, air and earth in its fold. It was, truly, a tall, tactile symbol of this man's vision.

He refused to meet me thereafter. I tried to sound him on whether he was serious about the job offer. "Submit the reports first,' was all he offered. Not to be put out, I worked with vengeance and met the deadline. He promptly paid me for the work, but after that, he ignored my calls for several weeks. But one day, the call did come, telling me to meet him at his office. Typically, he did not say a word about my reports. Instead, he straight away offered me a job and asked when I would like to join. I said January 2003. That, in sum, was how my journey with Uncle and his dream began.

Uncle had been prophetic when he had said: "I will offer you an adventure." It was an adventure of learning, of pumping your mental sinews till it pained, so that it activated your creative potential to the full. It was, more often than not, a bumpy journey of discoveries and experiences that taught through humility. It was a world of visions ensconced on the pedestal of reality. Often, I felt as if we were the ego-free present in a timeless universe of seamless past and future. Mr. Mishra ruled this universe and shared it with those close to him.

It took me over a year to get a toehold in the Chairman's sanctum sanctorum. The first task given to me at the ORF was to prepare the background—a long, boring and backbreaking job of creating a comprehensive database on Pakistan. When he broached the subject, I thought of politely asking him to spare me the drudgery. After years of hard-core reporting and writing, I was not very keen to get down on my knees and, piece by tiresome piece, put together a database that, I thought, could be done by any one with a working knowledge of typing and cataloguing, such as a computer-savvy librarian. As soon as he began to explain the whys and wherefores of his idea, I realised I was way off the mark and that he was thinking way ahead. This painstaking care and forethought he put in to his work was a basic trait in his character, as I was to realise later. Besides, since I prepared the data base, I was its master and could use it, refer to it or amend it if necessary with far greater efficacy than if someone else had prepared it. This was the world of research, not of daily reporting.

His idea was simple: to create a comprehensive database based on newspaper and magazine articles from Pakistan, digitize them to make them searchable and

accessible and build on it with data from other sources, including primary documents and images. Very few organisations had such a database. There was lot of information, huge libraries and resources, but no one had thought of collating them on a single platform outside the government. Policymakers relied on contemporary events and were either disinclined to study, or were unaware of historical events that—common sense will tell you—inevitably shaped current events and responses. Mr. Mishra knew this all too well. He had had a distinguished career as an editor of newspapers and magazines. He had been a close confidante of the top political and business leadership, as also of key policymakers of his time. He had the unique distinction of being both an insider and outsider, a maverick Brahmin who walked the corridors of power without hankering for a room in South Block. He was his own man, too much of an individualist to be tied down. He chose the ring-side view of history on the move, relishing in his ability give the players a light, indirect nudge of help every once in a while.

In meetings that he convened on the subject, he was at pains to hammer home the point that those who remain ignorant of history were likely to be condemned by history. "We must know what happened... must know who the key players are, where they came from, how they reacted to events, what they spoke, wrote and thought....a database is a key to open this door of history, and if we are to build ORF as a public policy think tank of world repute, we must build a database worth stealing. We must become a one-stop point for everything there is to know, for instance, about Pakistan." Among the vast spectrum of subjects he pursued, I would like to believe that Pakistan remained one of the most closest to his heart and mind. An unshakable patriot of the subcontinent, he never forgave those who allowed the Partition to happen.

It was quite remarkable how he swept aside the cobwebs of doubt, apathy and ennui in others and infused them with zeal and determination—a rare quality in someone who had seen, heard and lived it all. He was a pied piper who could persuade or bully us when he so desired, but at all times, he was the leader who made us treat whatever we were doing as a mission.

Many a doubting Thomas soon became his acolyte. He made us feel quietly proud of being a part of this great movement that outsiders never understood. The conference room in the old office, cramped with a huge table and loud with the din of a temperamental air-conditioner and a scatter of table fans became our hermitage, our alma mater.

At one level, it was like going to a boot camp. Get a crash course to learn new things, read reams upon reams of material, do the home work, forget the outside world and keep toiling and then, if you get the time, go home, eat and sleep before you return to do more of the same. Mr Mishra hardly slept and expected you to do the same. He emphasised the urgency of his tough deadlines with the quip: "I don't want the job done today. I want it done yesterday". Incomplete reports and suggestions were mercilessly trashed and thrown out. Weeks of hard work went flying out of the window with a flick of his hand, pushing us back to the drawing board. It was well nigh impossible to satisfy him. He picked holes in holes. His temperament matched his sardonic wit. He kept a poker face, hardly ever offered even a hint of appreciation and always left you wondering whether you had made a fool of yourself! It was his way of pushing you to think better, do better, and become better. He was a harsh teacher, but what a class he held!

I recollect a winter forenoon when he told the staffers during a meeting in the conference room:

"Friends, we want to make ORF a centre of excellence; for this it is necessary to be persistent. Persistent means a commitment to finish what you start. Those who start something and don't finish it in time diminish themselves and of course this persistence can only come from a purpose. Unless you are convinced of the purpose of what you are doing you will never be persistent, so there will always be distractions. A person who has no purpose will never accomplish anything. He will do things, but he will not accomplish any thing. There will be a lot of activity, there will not be any accomplishment. To achieve a purpose we must remember that nothing happens unless we make it happen".

He knew the young held the key to the future. He was old, almost ancient to the young lads and girls who joined the ORF as research interns and assistants, but he made them feel good, think beyond the conventional and eventually feel proud to be part of his dream. He had an uncanny knack of ideating cynics of all ages, turning them around to believe in him. His decision to begin Mondays with a staff meeting established a platform for the young and older scholars to present their studies, invite comments and questions and, most importantly, learn from the experience of making presentations and responding to questions. He quizzed the presenters with insightful questions, leading them to think afresh, find out the meaning of terms they often used without knowing the precise meaning and helped them to explore new perspectives. His presence ensured that we did our homework, prepared for the surprise questions to the best of our ability and learn, through being humbled, the value of humility. The Monday meetings turned into a unique learning laboratory with the Chairman, always punctual and attentive, offering insights and nuggets of experience which opened the doors and windows in an inquiring mind. These one-hour meetings continue and, though it is just not the same thing without his presence, participants are eager as ever to inform and impress the audience, learning from the mistakes in their presentations and perspectives.

I had the honour of being chosen to lead the Monday Meetings, and am humbled by the fact the meetings have now become an essential part of the Foundation's activities. These meetings remain, in my opinion, a weekly tribute to the man who founded, inspired and led ORF to where it is today.

ORF, to him, was not just another think tank or research organisation. It was an idea for which the time to flower had come. India, he used to often quip, was run by those who believed all wisdom was vested with them alone. They never looked out of their dusty, closed windows to see how the world outside was changing by the hour. If India was to rise to the expectations of its billion people, there was a need to change the way the government dealt, not only with its own people, but also with the world. He saw India as a strong eco -political world power in the years to come. ORF, he believed, could be a vehicle for this aspiration to Build Partnerships for a Global India. Addressing the staffers one day, he said:

"The world looks at India as an immense market. We look at her as an ocean of talent, of knowledge, of vibrant culture, of natural resources, and above all, as a reservoir of young men and women with dreams in their eyes and faith in the collective destiny. ORF aspires to become a catalyst for translating these dreams into reality".

He never lost a chance to reiterate his vision of the Foundation. But Monday meetings and internal discussions remained his favourite platform for the purpose. He knew that there were as many views on the Foundation's charter and activities as there were people who worked in it. Many thought it should become a research organisation, much on the lines of the government-funded Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, or like the Jawaharlal Nehru University and even like a publishing house. For over two to three years after I joined, the most passionate discussions centred on ORF's identity. The Chairman had no such doubts. To quote from a staff meeting he addressed on 20 December 2004, a little over a year after we moved into the new premises on 20, Rouse Avenue:

"We are a think tank and slowly we must sharpen the meaning of a think tank. We are not India International Centre where events are organised, lectures are given, and lunches are organised. All this is a part [of it], but it must all lead to a final product which must be a public policy product. Our product should influence public policy. Therefore, unlike the universities where people are engaged in doing a lot of research that is very useful, we are working for public policies that are being handled today".

A year later, at another Monday meeting, with doubts among the top hierarchy still to be resolved, he sharpened the focus:

"A think-tank is expected to provide policy inputs, policy alternatives and policy responses to contemporary challenges. Of course, very often these have long-term implications. A change in mindset is required if we want to realise the ORF vision. Our output must reach policy makers and our work is not complete unless this is done".

Despite his 24x7 schedule of meetings, writings and introspection, the ORF remained his most obsessive focal point. Though by nature a lone ranger, and intellectually a sharpshooter, he was also driven by a very human and social urge to walk his dream with others. Like an over-protective mother, he was keen on knowing everything about his child, and if someone dared speak or do anything without him knowing about it, he would gather a storm around him. It is from such intense living with the dream from whence came the thoughts and ideas to shape the Foundation.

Mr Mishra could never stress enough the importance of communication within an institution and with the outside world—that is, the free flow of information and exchange of ideas. But it was the ear, the immediate and prime receiver of the word of mouth that, he lamented, was the most ignored. He once explained exactly what he meant:

"Team work requires internalisation of a very simple thing—the importance of listening. All of us know that there are four modes of communication, reading, writing speaking and listening. And most people spend two thirds to three fourths of their waking hours doing these four things. Most of us have years and years of training in reading writing and many of us in public speaking, but no more than five percent of us, if at all, have had even two weeks of formal training in how to listen. Most people think they know how to listen because they are doing it all the time, but they are only hearing and they are not listening. To truly listen means to get out of your own frame of reference and judging tendencies and to get deeply into the viewpoint of the other person who is speaking to you. It is a very very rare skill. It is more than a skill. You have to be sincerely open and listen to the

other person".

On his part, he was always willing to listen to the senior as well as the younger staff members; in fact, many of us felt, he spent lot of time listening to people who were not really committed to him or the Foundation. He made no distinction, though. He would often surprise the staffers by walking up the stairs to the third floor where most of the researchers worked, and enquire about everything but their work. He knew his staff quite closely and sought out the human side in each one of them. Though he remained a tough man to work for, his generosity endeared him to many of his staffers, even though some of them had faced the brunt of his temper. He left no one untouched and made it a point to talk to even the youngest with charm and respect.

This alchemy of wisdom and youth has been the nectar of the Foundation's life. He had envisaged the organisation standing tall, spreading wide and still yearning sinuously upwards for higher reaches, just like the Bodhi tree, which is the symbol of the Foundation. Its trunk and the main branches symbolise wisdom and experience, holding a canopy of the young and eager, vibrant leaves, ever straining hard to touch the heavens. Trees are like outstretched arms of the earth, holding up the sky, weathering the scorching sun, the rain and the storms through day and night, through all four seasons—a symbol of the challenges and hardships man faces both in body and mind in his spiritual quest. The ORF, to the Chairman, was no less a quest, a discovery, a struggle, a prayer and an offering to his beloved India, the subcontinent.

He had many detractors, even among those with whom he shared his ideas and thoughts. He knew that, in a country that has, to date, failed to shake off the yoke of the bureaucracy, the impregnable armour of the British Empire, it was almost impossible to get his views across, to be heard. For, as the good book says 'they have ears, but hear not'. But he was a determined man, very like a stubborn teenager who refuses to take no for an answer. He set about his task with characteristic zeal and persuaded men of high intellect and experience to join his team as Distinguished Fellows. He recruited a handful of middle-rung Senior Fellows and set up a scheme of internships to attract young talent. Soon enough, even in the cramped, previous office in CP, we had some of the most distinguished diplomats, policy-makers and military officers on board as Distinguished Fellows. Then flocked in the interns from different parts of the city. Too many of them wanted to join the Foundation, but we just didn't have the space to put them up. Many of them were recruited, but told to come back in June (2003), after we moved into the new building on Rouse Avenue.

He insisted that the interns be given a structured pre- induction programme. He issued directives that it was mandatory for a new appointee to work as an intern for a period of three to four weeks before joining his or her designated programme. It would prove to be an enduring legacy of the Founder. Many of the interns who enthusiastically slaved during the early days and occasionally cursed and threatened to walk out remember with great fondness and respect the Chairman's kindness, long after they had left for greener pastures. This was the strange effect he had on people.

Rarely was he late in coming to office. It was a spacey, well-lit room on the second floor of the new building with comfortable seating arrangements that left a pleasant impression on the visitor. It was here that he would often think aloud before his close associates and chart out new schemes and plans adding to an

ever-lengthening list of priorities. Nothing was unimportant. He lent a sense of urgency to everything he did or expected you to do. A million ideas were born in that room. Here, it all began - tasks were handed out, deadlines set and failures reprimanded. I have seen young scholars bursting out crying after leaving the room. He could be remorseless in his criticism. But, before he went out, he would make sure to call the aggrieved person, talk nicely and make him or her feel as if nothing had happened. These were the ways of his that will keep his memory alive for those of us who have had the privilege of working with him, for him.

He was aware that many of us whom he directly recruited worked first for him and only then for the organisation. He wanted it the other way around, but it was difficult. His solution was to create separate units within the organisation, all in sync, but charting out their own individual course to their goals and objectives. He was acutely conscious of the fact that, if the ORF were to survive as an institution in what would be some of the most challenging years ahead, it must spring up from the bedrock of experience and institutional processes which, he always insisted, must include ways and means to be self-reliant. In one of his office-memos, he wrote:

"As you are all aware, the ORF is now at an important stage in its growth. The reputation of ORF is closely linked with the intellectual depth of its work and the ability to deliver products and services regularly and efficiently. The ORF is expanding its reach among policy-makers and academia in India and abroad, as well as among business leaders worldwide. Diversifying the resource base of the ORF by involving private corporate entities and foundations and to attract endowments and grants is another serious ORF initiative, which now needs to be pursued with vigour."

It was human resources that most engaged Mr Mishra. He wanted the ORF to be a powerhouse of human potential. He envisaged it as a place where youngsters came to learn and work under seniors who, in turn, imbibed the zest and challenge of the youth. To him, ORF was an experiment no one in India had attempted. His formula for the organisation's growth was simple and clear: let wisdom and experience lead and channelise the power and energy of youth and curiosity. The bridge between youth and experience was the Senior Fellow.

Mr Mishra's creative zeal went into every thing. Individual agendas and reporting patterns were laid out. Procedures for evaluating research proposals, reviewing and publishing them were documented and widely circulated. Specific targets for completing the projects were set. Review meetings were held regularly to oversee the implementation of these directives. New alliances with global think tanks and organisations were made. Top policy makers visited ORF, interacted with its faculty and went back impressed by the intellectual vigour of the place and happy with the fine hospitality shown to them. Joint projects with some of the world's top-notch policymaking bodies in the world gave ORF a name and reputation hard to rival.

This evolution of one man's idea into a mission for many unfolded in quick succession, to the surprise of many within and outside the organisation. Sceptics began to sit up and take notice of this man who had so swiftly shaped an organisation of redoubtable repute and courage. The ORF took just a few years to gain the kind of respect and appreciation that others, in similar circumstances, took decades to acquire. It was a revolution in the making, a revolution of ideas, thinking and determination.

Mr Rishi Kumar Mishra, the Chairman, was the fulcrum of this unique and silent revolution called Observer Research Foundation. To call it merely a public policy think tank would be short sighted. A seed can germinate a million revolutions [of the mind] in India and outside. When men of worth and substance pass away, people ask, 'after him, who?' In this case, the answer is simple and obvious: After RKM, the ORF.

COMMITMENT TO PEOPLE

A REMARKABLE PERSON

Prodosh Aich

The bell rings unexpectedly on a late winter afternoon. It is 1966 and since August Gisela and I have lived on the campus of the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. Our Bungalow, C-2, has a lawn with a fence. The gate is open and, after hesitating for a moment, I come out to the veranda.An amicable stranger looks through the fence of the veranda. I open the door. "I am Rishi Kumar Mishra. I am just curious to meet the person who talks to me on phone seeking my journalistic support, makes 18 appointments with me and just refuses to accept my obvious disinterest in meeting him." That is how he introduces himself, with a big friendly smile. "Do I have an alternative?" I counter, as I welcome him in.

Gisela joins us. We sit together for a long time. He listens to our version of the controversy between us and almost all the rest of the academics on campus. As a member of the Cologne University in West Germany, I have been invited to teach sociology for one academic year at the University. Gisela is an economist. Together we are engaged in research.

The Head of the Department of Sociology demands from both of us that we start writing and publishing in his name. We refuse. This is the beginning of a clash that escalated to slanders, false allegations and threats. We are accused of selling smuggled goods, possessing German guns and spying for Pakistan and West Germany. Then comes strange people lurking around the house, staring in. Next follows mobbing, abuse, threats on the campus, on the streets, on the phone. We have been absolutely isolated on the campus for weeks.

A few persons visit us in the darkness of the night to apologize and express their fears. Dr. Rajendra Prashad Sharma of the Hindi Department, is the only exception. We have almost no common interest. Yet he and his family demonstrate civil courage, knowing what was happening to us. Having no other option, I try to mobilize help through the press. I hear that there is one Rishi Kumar Mishra, a resourceful journalist, correspondent of Patriot in New Delhi, having excellent contacts in the State Government. He has written a few critical reports on the University as well.

Rishi Kumar Mishra studies our file. He does not comment. He is not in hurry and makes a lot of enquiries. Ultimately he takes leave, assuring us that he will be back soon. He is back the next evening and then again the next evening with an elderly friend of his, Radha Ballav Ji, a senior lawyer. No discussions on our clash in the University. They narrate episodes and stories, current and ancient, many of them from Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. All of them convey one central message: Life is clash. One has to fight it through.

This is the beginning of a relationship that was to last till Rishi physically left us. In Jaipur, we meet every day; in the campus to begin with, then at his residence. His residence cum office is a bungalow in the C-Scheme area of the city, with a spacious lawn in the front. We reach the place in the late afternoons. On the lawn there are chairs, *khatias* (cots) and his improvised office. We chat with Bina ji, the children and various visitors. We play cards. Rishi does his daily writing. He

does not feel disturbed. Early in the evening his telex-line to Delhi opens. After the transmission he puts off the light and joins the company. Most of the visitors leave before dinner. The children go to bed after dinner whenever they like. We stay on till early morning. We discuss, we converse, we listen to Rishi's meaningful narrations and we play cards. Quite often a jeep will arrive late in the evenings to take him to Chief Minister Mohanlal Sukhadia's residence. He is tensed up over some conflict with the Birlas. So Sukhadia calls Rishi for his precious analysis.

This routine of meetings evolves naturally. Soon, it is taken for granted that we will come again the next afternoon. Quite a few *rikshawalas* know that we would go back to the campus only after midnight. Every night, we find one rikshawala sleeping in front of the house.

This routine continues. On 6 July 1967, the last day of my assignment at the University, we leave Jaipur for Delhi and then for Kolkata. Many things happen before that. Our bungalow is searched, there are police and customs enquiries, arrest for a few hours, dismissal without cause by the University of Rajasthan, the court case, collection of all published minutes of meetings at the University, two empirical surveys on university students and teachers in Jaipur and Delhi, dismissal by Cologne University on the intervention of the University of Rajasthan...

.. .And then I win the case in the Jaipur court.

What follows is my reappointment to the University of Rajasthan, a private reception by Dr. Zakir Hussain in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and financial aid from the Union Ministry of Education to extend my empirical studies to the Universities of Calcutta and Jadavpur.

Rishi does not cover any of these events. In fact, he does not write a single line on our resistance and battles on the campus. Nor does he attend the press conferences I convene. He is friendly as ever, introduces us to his visitors. We almost become members of his family. One evening we are introduced to K.P Mishra, Reader in the Department of Political Science, Rajasthan University. He says he knows all about us. We are surprised. He has dealt officially with the allegations against us. He has asked the Vice-Chancellor of the University to stop "all this nuisance". And he is keen to see that we are physically safe.

Rishi does not help us directly in our battle against the University people. He sees beyond the battle. Obviously he is concerned about our physical safety in Jaipur. And he is a resourceful person. During the day our bungalow is under observation. In the night we are in C-Scheme. He does not talk to us on this issue. This is his style of communication which has often resulted in a negative and harmful impact on his reputation. He knows it. It does not matter to him.

We are set to leave for Delhi to carry out our survey. Rishi suggests that we meet there. He would like to take us to Haridwar for the marriage ceremony of his youngest sister, Pratibha. He, as the eldest brother, and his parents, will have to be present.

We meet in Delhi. While we wait for the train to depart, he gives some money to a shoe polish boy and requests him to buy raw cotton thread for him. Within minutes the boy hands over the thread. The train departs. Rishi is busy weaving

the holy threads; he will require them in the ceremony. After our arrival he settles us in a retiring room of the railway station. He is to stay with his parents in a *dharamshala*. He takes us there to discuss some details with his parents. Mataji we know from in Jaipur.

It is understood that he will have to look after us. In the late afternoon we go to the ghat. Rishi hires a dhoti, takes a shave and meets a *purohit*. He goes through the ceremonies, takes a bath in the cool unpolluted water of the Ganga and asks us to follow his example. Gisela hires a sari and takes a bath at a point where only extraordinarily lucky persons get the opportunity for a dip. We stay on till dark. It is a wonderful sight, lamps floating on the river. Then we get our poori, dal and *sabji* in a small shop.

Only then does Rishi instruct us that we should not accept any food and drink in the house of the bridegroom's family during the ceremonies, which will take hours. He himself has to fast for the whole day. But in the late forenoon he takes us for 'breakfast'. We go to the same place as the previous evening. He orders food for all of us and smiles. He is hungry. So he breaks the fast. The apparent contradictions are no real contradictions. One has to try to look beyond events, in a broader perspective, before judging. We come back. The ceremony continues. Rishi fulfills his duties. It is a wonderful day.

On 6 July, we leave Jaipur and take only a few of our 17 trunks to Kolkata. Many in the campus thought that we would never be able to leave Jaipur. In Kolkata we meet up with Pratibha and her parents. In October 1967 we come back to Jaipur, spend two days with the Sharmas and Mishras, collect our luggage and leave for Mumbai to sail for Germany.

After ten long years, in March 1977, we revisit Delhi. We meet B.B. Saxena, publisher of Parliamentary Times in New Delhi. I was writing for this paper from Germany. B.B. Saxena informs us that Rishi now lives in Delhi, on Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road. He is now a member of the Rajya Sabha and Chief Editor of *Patriot*. In 1976 he had also launched a literacy project in Jaipur, which has grown in to a unique movement.

Since 1971 I had been working at the Oldenburg University and was also attached to the First German Channel, the broadcasting institution in Cologne. Mrs. Gandhi had been defeated and the Janata Party was in power. We decide to make audio-visual programmes on the many changes in the country and come back with a television team in August 1977. We are guests of R.K. Mishra and stay at the Western Court in Janpath. Every evening we meet after our shooting schedule. Mostly we discuss family affairs late into the night. Rishi does not inform us about his literacy project in Jaipur. Yet we decide to make an audio visual report on that project. Ultimately, Rishi promises to help us in organizing the shooting. A day before our departure he invites us for a dinner in Hotel Janpath along with Baby, his eldest daughter. At the end, he asks us to cancel our shooting in Jaipur. We are dumb-founded. We keep quiet.

I have a long talk with Gisela. We decide to walk down to Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road in the early hours before Rishi starts his daily work. He has not even completed his morning duties. We show our anger and disappointment, rebuke him for some minutes and, before he can say a word, assure him that we shall proceed to Jaipur and start shooting with or without his help. The atmosphere is tense. Then after about half an hour he takes up the phone and makes a few

calls. Late in the afternoon we reach Jaipur and meet quite a few people in the Hotel Gangaur. Renuka was to guide us and she does. The whole thing is well organized. We work hard for three and a half days.

During our shooting we realize that the literacy project in Jaipur is unique, in theory and in practice. When I say unique, I mean it is one of its kind in the whole world. It is more a mass movement than a project. No funds are involved. Students are mobilized to go to the slums and poorer quarters, but not to teach but to learn—learn about social disparities talking to the people. All together—the students and the people—sit down to identify day-to-day strains and pains of living in those localities, search for solutions and organize centres for regular meetings. They consider the laws and the Constitution, the working of public service agencies and collect all available information. In this process, the importance of knowing how to read and write dawns on the *"literates to be"* and, thus motivated, they pick up these basic abilities much faster. Finding solutions for their needs is the beginning of a process to widen the perspective for those social changes that they themselves choose as necessary and get ready to fight for them. The process starts with seeking solutions within the prevailing system. It takes its own course. And, in turn, the students learn first hand about social discrimination and deprivation. It is this mutual rise of awareness that makes the project unique, for it unites the 'haves' and the 'have nots' through a shared sense of purpose. Rishi develops a far superior idea than that of Paulo Freire, which has been internationally celebrated. The concept has succeeded in Jaipur.It can succeed any and everywhere, but the time is not ripe for a project of this kind. It is a social movement for eradicating illiteracy without manipulation of minds by the selfacclaimed 'superior' class of people.

As social scientists, we explore and keep our records in sound and visuals. It is necessary that we interview all key protagonists. Though days pass after the shooting in Jaipur, and we meet every day, Rishi just refuses to beinterviewed. Two days before our departure we force another confrontation with Rishi. Only then does the interview actually happen. His fear that our report might look like a marketing hype is proven wrong. He could not have known this while our report was in the making. As it turns out, our report on this project has become our best documentary film. Titled *The Key Word is the Beginning*, it has been shown on television and praised in international film festivals. But it is unlikely that the real value of this project will be understood before the collapse of capitalism.

Since 1977 we have met Rishi and Renuka almost every year. We were together for weeks, in Germany or in Bharatavarsha. He has lived a rich life, though not in terms of money. I have observed him in all important stages of his life. For sure he made mistakes and even blunders. one does not grow without making mistakes. But I never found him to be dishonest or untruthful.

Rishi was of my age. He was also in Kolkata. He spoke Bengali fluently, my mother tongue. His recitation of Rabindranath Tagore was excellent. We could have met there also. But we met only in Jaipur. Both of us belonged to the class created by Thomas Babington Macaulay. We may recall the implementation of his educational programme in Bharatavarsha. In 1835 he wrote: *We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit*

vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

But Rishi was different. His Gurudev Pandit Motilal Shastri had picked him out, trained and educated him. We have listened to so many stories of his encounter with his Gurudev. On such occasions, Rishi was a different person altogether. Often he mentioned that he has to write on the Vedic knowledge that he had acquired from his Guru. Very few persons knew about this commitment. Only Rishi knew that such assignments couldn't be accomplished on command. When the time came, arrived, he did his duty -and did it superbly.

I wonder whether Rishi ever needed friends. Renuka, yes, he needed. He knew a lot of persons belonging to all walks of life. A few were close to him. He had many professional and political associates. They came. They went. Many of them were just exploiters. And he knew it. Generally he was not concerned about it. But all those indecent happenings and meanness in Link House did touch him.

He was never a hunter of personal career. The career came to him in the course of time. He did his best. But the hardest work he had to put in was transferring Vedic knowledge into as primitive a language as English. It is like pouring litres of milk in a pot with a capacity of only half a litre. He did it all alone. No other scholar was around for discussion.

He lived in two worlds. Yet he did not develop a dual personality. He acquired the ability to move amongst the "Macaulays" freely and efficiently. In the core of his heart he remained rooted in our ancient Sanatan Dharma.

Rishi is one of the very few persons who brought me back to *Bharatavarsha*, though I continue to live in Germany. As long as I live Rishi will be alive in me. And he is remembered in one of my books and in the documentary, *The Key Word is the Beginning*. The visual reveals more than words.

FRIEND, PHILOSOPHER, GUIDE

Primila Lewis

I met RK and Renuka in early 1979. My recently published book, Reason Wounded: An Experience of India's Emergency, which both of them had read, led them to contact me with a view to Renuka joining my work with the labouring poor in the villages, farms, quarries and brick kilns in the then still rural hinterland of Mehrauli.

I had recently resumed work in this area after spending 19 months in prison under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) during the State of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in June 1975. The group of young people who had already joined me after reading my book were all left- wing radicals with no party affiliations. We shared a common anti-establishment bias and wanted radical social change and people's power in India. I myself had been a committed member of a Marxist-Leninist group which rigidly adhered to Mao Tse Tung thought and China's path to revolution. The long months in prison had given me time to think through some of our rigidities and dogmas but while I felt the need to modify much of our thinking I was confused about the way forward.

All of us liked Renuka but about RK we had deep misgivings. He was everything we were not and was distrusted by everyone we spoke to about him. He was a mainstream politician and member of the Rajya Sabha, a seasoned journalist with a pro-Soviet newspaper but mistrusted by the 'establishment' Left because he had never joined a Communist party and, worst of all, he was said to be close to Mrs Gandhi! We, who hated mainstream politics and above all the Congress party, and opposed Soviet 'socialism' were agreed that R.K. Mishra was to be avoided, even though we welcomed Renuka into our group.

Although RK never interfered in our work, interaction with him was unavoidable with Renuka's increasing involvement and our increasing use of their home for meetings to discuss and plan our activities. He was often present at these meetings and listened to our views carefully. In fact, this was one of the first things I noticed. RK would never comment until he had heard everyone out with total attention. This in itself was a remarkable quality but then, when he did finally offer his comments, we found that whether the subject was about national or international issues or the problems we were facing in the field, his contributions were invariably—and to begin with annoyingly—weighty and impossible to ignore.

One day soon after Renuka started working with us, RK paid me a visit. He sat down in the only chair I had and began by telling me why he was keen that Renuka work with us and what had attracted both of them to the work I had described in my book. He told me about their travels around the country, meeting a large number of radical 'non-party political groups' as they came to be called, and two journals they had set up, *How* in English and *Kaise* in Hindi, to act as a platform for discussion and analysis with and for these groups. He expressed sympathy for the Naxalites who he felt were more dedicated than most to the cause of the exploited and downtrodden.

I found it easy to talk with him and felt able to question him about all the aspects

which had aroused our mistrust of him. He answered each of these seriously, without evading issues and explained, to my satisfaction, why he held the positions he did about mainstream politics, the Soviet Union, Mrs Gandhi, and so on.

In retrospect and with the understanding I have of RK today, I can see that he also followed one of his favourite dictums in that conversation with me. *'Jitna bara lota hai usme utna hi pani dalo'*! RK would not reveal or explain himself beyond what he judged was the receiving capacity of the person he was talking to. Not only that, it would also depend on the trust between the parties involved. Yet, what he did say was always considered and substantive. He never talked down to me or to anyone else, as far as I know.

So began a relationship—political, personal and finally even spiritual—which transformed me and many around me in ways that I am still comprehending. Perhaps the starting point was in mid 1979.

The Janata Party experiment was ending in fiasco and it was clear that a mid-term election was around the corner. It was also clear that there had been a swing to the Right under the Janata Party and while we dreaded a return of the authoritarian Mrs Gandhi, the Left too stood discredited. The CPI because it had supported the Emergency and the CPI (M) because it had aligned with right-wing and communal elements to oppose this. However, we felt we had no option but to try to strengthen the Left now and would campaign for any Left candidate in Mehrauli.

At a large meeting of farm workers one night we got a real shock. We asked them who they would vote for and their answer was unanimous. 'We will vote for Indira'. We were astounded.

'But you have experienced her tyranny during the Emergency; how can you want her back now?' 'Yes,' was the answer, 'We brought her down because she became arrogant. But she has learnt her lesson and we will bring her back to power. At least she did something for us. The Janata has taken away even what she gave us'.

'Surely you know that the slogans of the 20-Point Programme were eyewash? How many of you got the land that was promised or had your debts liquidated?' 'Some people have received these things, others have not. It will take time but we will get them from Indira.'

This was a turning point in my thinking. Perhaps we had even got Mao's, 'from the people to the people' wrong. We had started with a blueprint for the revolution and a stereotyped understanding of the 'revolutionary masses' based entirely on the Chinese revolution. We had never considered where our own people were or their experience, perceptions and aspirations. And it was not only us, the 'Maoists,' but the entire Left who were in this predicament. Else why, after 60 years of dedicated effort, had there still been no revolution despite the 'objective' being so ripe?

Of the many people with whom we raised this question, RK was the only one who had new ideas to offer. Unless the Communists had a serious will to power, he said, the Left could never become an alternative to the Congress. And in order to become a real alternative it must present to the people a superior development

perspective for the whole country. 'The trouble is', RK said, 'the Communists do not like hard work. They have become so used to being in the opposition that they have become bogged down in economism, piecemeal demands and agitations. Even where they had won power they had only been able to implement old but neglected Congress programmes for the people. The Left must address itself to what it could positively do in agriculture, industry, science and technology, health, education, employment, etc.'

This discussion opened my eyes to the enormous complexities and challenges facing societies in transition, and the desperate need for intellectuals and parties on the Left, un-bounded and un-blinkered by doctrinaire sectarianism, to begin to deal with these problems. organising people on economic demands and mere agitation and propaganda was insufficient and negative. What then would be the way forward for India? This question lay at the heart of the matter. With RK's help we set out on the search for answers—not from books or readymade recipes but by taking 'mass work' by the horns, as it were, and learning by doing, from the labouring poor and the villagers of Mehrauli.

The next major turning point in our work was the struggle of the scheduled caste inhabitants of Mandi village for land. The original allotment of gram sabha land to the landless had been made in 1960. As was the norm in rural India, this was ignored by the upper caste landholders who quickly grabbed all the best land themselves. The scheduled castes were invariably too vulnerable and small in number to stand up to the dominant castes.

Under the Emergency and Mrs Gandhi's populist 20- Point Programme, the Harijans again made a concerted bid, by petitioning the government, to acquire the long promised land. Except for more promises and assurances, however, they could not make any headway. The dominant Gujars of Mandi were implacably opposed to any land distribution to the Harijans and, as was the norm, it was they who called the shots. over this period, however, the scheduled castes all over the country were beginning to assert themselves over the land issue, and this led to terrible violence on them by the upper castes. The massacres of Pipra, Belchi and, in Delhi itself, the bloodshed in Khanjavala through the Janata years had brought the issue to the forefront of public awareness.

It was soon after the Khanjavala violence that the Harijans of Mandi sought our help in their struggle. What followed was an intense and unflagging effort on our part to grapple with the dynamics of village society which were very different to those of the landless migrants we had mainly worked with till now.

Our approach everywhere was, in the typical Left tradition which RK had criticised, to unite and organise the workers concerned over their core needs and demands, seek support from other sections of workers in the area and then agitate to fulfil their demands. So far the main focus of our work had been on the farm workers and the implementation of the Minimum Wages Act. Mandi was a very different kettle of fish. The Harijans, although at the bottom of the caste ladder, were both more politically sophisticated and more faction-ridden than the simple Purabias on the farms. Also, while many of them wanted the allotted land, some said they weren't interested and none of them were prepared to confront the Gujars over the issue.

Added to this were the social mores of a still custom- bound society—women could not attend and certainly not speak in meetings, sons could not speak in

front of their fathers and other elders, Chamars would not go to meetings in the homes of the Valmikis, the leaders were not accountable to the community and no one dared question them.

While we struggled to overcome these obstacles on the ground, we found support and guidance from RK who was always able to put his finger on the heart of the problem and how it could be dealt with. Thus, rather than imposing our own radical solutions, we were able to hold our horses and go with the pace, however slow and tortuous, of the Harijans themselves, so that they could themselves realise what needed doing as they proceeded to discuss and find what they felt were their own solutions but which were organic to the process of changing their attitudes in order to be more effective in achieving their goals. It was also a process of building up their self-confidence by allocating responsibility, insisting on accountability and taking collective decisions in the regularl weekly meetings in Mandi.

At every weekly meeting a report on the previous week's progress was made and decisions taken for follow up action. The chosen representatives of the Harijans would accompany us on every visit made to the administrative or police officials. In this way they learned how to deal with officialdom effectively and report back to their constituents in the village for approval of steps taken, expenses incurred and further suggestions. A vital process of leadership building was thus initiated.

These weekly meetings with every section of the workers we were involved with were a vital forum for our work. Through the day we would be following up on the decisions taken at the workers meetings in government offices, labour courts, police stations, or with farm owners, contractors, etc. always along with a nominated group of workers themselves. This was so that they could learn how to deal with the bureaucracy, their employers, et al on their own.

Here again, it was RK's guiding hand which enabled us to make the distinction between the above objectives and what we left-wingers had earlier believed, i.e. that since the state, the landowners, the contractors etc., were the 'class enemy' and implacably anti-people, the main objective was to expose them in order to unite the people to fight against them. This led to intense polarisation and conflict with the odds heavily stacked against the workers who were ultimately too weak and vulnerable to be able to hold out against the combined might of the farm owners, village elites, police and bureaucracy ranged against them, who would not stop at violence if it came to it. Whatever the 'exposure' this led to, it also demoralised and defeated the workers.

RK showed us, through the struggle itself, whether that of the farm workers or quarry workers or the village Harijans— that there was both space and scope for a more nuanced and intelligent approach. While he never, for a moment, lost sight of what was in the best interest of the workers, his way was to give their adversaries every chance to arrive at a fair, negotiated settlement which would not only be reasonable but would be seen to be so as well. This disarmed the powers-that-be and not infrequently even won their grudging approval.

Thus it was in Mandi. After months of patient work to unite the Harijans, petition the authorities to make good their promises, and cross hurdle after hurdle put in our way, things came to a head when we were informed by the District Commissioner that in fact, by a recent Supreme Court order on the Khanjavala case, the government could not distribute the land in question, since only the

gram sabha had that right.

This made a mockery of the entire 'land to the landless' programme. Everywhere in the country, and everyone knew this, the gram sabhas were dominated by the upper castes who would, only over their dead bodies, give land to the landless—especially to the scheduled castes.

For eight months the Harijans of Mandi had pursued the administration with a tenacity which had shamed even its officials. Now they were faced with the stark truth. Outside the DC's office, Ramu, one of the Harijan leaders, turned to me and said bitterly: "*Behnji*, you were right. Now we know the only way is to fight. Petitions have got us nowhere."

But how to conduct this fight? The Harijans were not yet fully united, the Gujars, who outnumbered them three to one, would oppose them tooth and nail, and we were not at all confident that the Harijans could face the very real threat of violence from them.

Tensions became alarmingly high in the village, and the police summoned the Harijan leaders along with four or five panchayat members and the Pradhan to the police station. We went with them as well. The police wanted the Harijans to sign a bond promising to keep the peace in Mandi. We protested that any violence so far had been committed only by the Gujars and that they too must sign the bond. This was agreed and both parties signed.

While we were discussing this development and wondering what to do next, RK made a decisive intervention. He suggested that the Harijans should immediately serve notice to the Government of India, i.e., the Prime Minister (Mrs Gandhi had just been voted back), the Home Minister and the Lt. Governor of Delhi, that they were being driven to desperation by the landlords of Mandi village who would not let them occupy the land allotted to them by this very government, and that now they had no recourse but to take forcible possession of the land themselves. RK also suggested that we call a press conference on the day this notice was delivered to announce the date of the action and to explain to the public why they had been forced to take this step.

We were aghast at the audacity of this step—could our tiny group and the small number of Harijans of Mandi 'serve notice' on the Government of India, and Mrs. Gandhi's government at that? And could we, who had never called a press conference—the press being part of the 'anti-people establishment', do this as well? Who would listen to us?

'Don't underestimate yourselves and the work you are doing,' said RK in reply. 'And above all, don't underestimate the people you are working with or the issue at stake.'

I then expressed doubts about our ability to organise press conferences, meetings with the Prime Minister, and so on. RK brushed this aside. 'You don't have to do this, the people will.' RK turned to the Harijans who nodded vigorously, 'We can meet Indira at her morning durbar'.

So it was decided that a delegation of women would take the memorandum to the Prime Minister while a group of the men would deliver it to the Lt. Governor the same morning. In the afternoon, the Harijans would hold a press conference

which we must organise.

But first and before wind of this got out, we had to prepare the Harijans for the final confrontation.

Now that the course of action was decided, every man, woman and child was mobilised. Meetings were packed, women said they would court arrest, children said they would be the 'eyes and ears' for the people and also act as couriers, and all said they would be prepared to go to jail if necessary. We were quite carried away by the response, but RK warned us to be cautious as the action planned was fraught with danger, and it remained to be seen whether the Harijans would be able to go through with it. Alerting the press might prevent a bloodbath but the threat of this was real.

A few days before delivering the ultimatum to the government, RK came with us to the village. It was an intense and highly charged meeting. When things quietened down a bit, he very clearly and simply put it to the Harijans that they must finally decide if they could go through with their decision. He pointed out all the dangers. Were they ready to face all this and go ahead with the plan?

'We are ready', was the answer. 'Every man, woman and child is ready to die for our land.'

'But what do you propose to do?'

'We will take our ploughs and bullocks and go on to the land. If we are stopped by the police we will court arrest in batches of seven. The lists are ready. First seven men consisting of the oldest and most scared so that they won't run away (laughter) and after them seven women and so on. Every day seven people will court arrest until even our children are all in jail.'

For over an hour RK grilled them with hard, intense and unsparing questions. Their high spirits had now sobered, there was pin drop silence in the room and their answers came back as hard and unsparing as RK's questions.

Never had I attended a meeting like this. Everything was laid bare, the dangers, the obstacles, the difficulties. No attempt was made to gloss over these or instil fake confidence, and yet the Harijans' resolve never wavered. There were no slogans, no shouting or raising of fists. Rather it was a business-like meeting intent only on getting to the bare bones of the issue. Finally RK was satisfied. 'Now I am convinced you can do it', he told them.

And they did it too. And not a drop of blood was shed— unlike elsewhere in the countryside when Dalits had raised their heads.

At the meeting held to celebrate their victory, RK made this reply to the Harijans when they said they would be forever indebted to us.

'We have done you no favours by helping you in your struggle. In fact it is we who are discharging a debt accumulated over centuries. On your part you have only one debt to discharge: you must carry the message of your struggle to every village in Mehrauli. You must create a Mandi in every village of Delhi.'

For some of us in the Mehrauli Group, RK's masterly orchestration of the final

phase in the struggle for land had been an object lesson in strategy and tactics, and his ability to think of and attend to every last detail of the action at every stage, so that the people held together and their confidence never wavered, was another major turning point in our understanding and experience of mass work. But this view was not shared by the young radicals in our group who felt that we had been dominated too much by RK with not enough scope to debate tactics etc., and that we had failed to expose the character of the state through the struggle. Instead, we had relied too much on the organs of state such as the bureaucracy, the police and the press, all of whom we should have shunned as enemies of the people.

We were stunned by what seemed to us to be the myopia of these young colleagues to the ground realities and the real interest of the people as against our own ideological predilictions. For me what had been an eye-opening learning experience was to them a betrayal of the workers'cause.

This led to a painful split in our group not long after when, in the course of a sudden and premature strike by the stone quarry workers next door to Mandi, we again could not agree tactics or strategy, on similar grounds.

After the split, however, we were able to move on and gradually increase membership of the group from local sources which strengthened us greatly. We also got invaluable help from a weekly discussion group comprising some good friends in academia who had earlier also been involved in Maoist politics, and above all from RK who attended every meeting without fail unless he was travelling.

In this discussion group RK demonstrated again his unique qualities. He would listen with great attention to the views of each member of the group on every issue. While the focus was always on our work in the field, there was also the need to see this in a broader framework nationally and internationally. When RK did finally speak, he invariably helped us to broaden and deepen our political understanding, put the issue in perspective, and also point the way to solve the concrete problems we were facing in our work. We always felt inspired and invigorated after these discussions.

One of the difficulties I am most indebted to RK for helping us to deal with was on the issue of differences— between individuals, within activist groups and NGOs, and between such groups. While our constant exortation to the workers was that they must unite, we ourselves seemed unable to resolve our own differences and were plagued by splits which were hardly an example to those we wanted to 'educate'. This was what had happened in our own group and also among the people we worked with and other groups we wished to join forces with.

RK drew important lessons from this. He urged us to explore ways of working together despite differences, and also to find a way to safeguard rather than destroy the friendship and trust between us even when this came under stress and disagreement. He did this with delicacy and sensitivity, never taking sides or standing in judgement, never being negative or undermining our confidence but somehow being able to stand above all this and show us what was most important both for ourselves and for our work. It was RK who saved my other, most treasured friendship—with Renuka—and enabled us to understand each other more truely and deeply.

Lest it be thought that we never disagreed with him, let me say that we often did and debated our differences hotly, but as long as we were sincere and able to substantiate our positions, RK never dismissed our concerns lightly.

RK was also an inspiration for the different sections of workers with whom he maintained frequent contact. His complete ease with people at every social level and his ability to understand and motivate them to meaningful action was remarkable. Above all, he inspired a trust in all of us that he would stand with us through thick and thin.

He never rested on his laurels either, but always urged us to raise our activity to levels we had never imagined before or thought possible to achieve.

After the successful struggle for land he urged us to 'think big' and work out a plan for the all-round development of the land and lives of the village poor—not only in Mandi but also in neighbouring villages with Mandi as the fulcrum. Thus, and again after strenuous effort, a co-operative society of the Mandi Harijans was registered to develop the land and make it productive. Similarly, we were able to help the stone quarry workers to set up their own co-operative and rid themselves of the exploitative contractors. on the farms he showed us practically how, by changing our earlier approach of confrontation with and hostility to the powerful farm owners, we could reach a more favourable outcome for the farm hands.

He also began a weekly discussion group with the farm workers which was attended punctually, regularly and with rapt attention while RK, using their own life experiences in their villages of origin and now on the farms, illustrated and explained the processes of accumulation, surplus value and the meaning of a fair distribution of wealth.

Our active involvement in Mehrauli ceased in 1990 when we realised that we were becoming a shackle on the workers' in some crucial ways. Clearly we were no longer indispensable to them and they must now make their own way forward with the self confidence they had gained over long years of struggle.

When, some ten years later, Renuka and I took up work with women and children affected by the violence in Jammu and Kashmir, RK was again a source of guidance and inspiration. Not only for us but for the NGos we were trying to develop in Kashmir, Jammu and Doda districts. He was able to communicate the essential meaning and purpose of our intervention which was to reach out to those who had suffered, irrespective of their politics or their religion, to build bridges between the disaffected and alienated and traumatised people and to restore some faith that the rest of India cared.

This, by helping children to complete their education and women to come out of their shell and work together to develop life enhancing skills with which to face the future.

All those who interacted with RK over several years of intensive work were moved and inspired and changed by the experience.

Where did this man find the time, despite his extremely busy schedule and important commitments elsewhere, to devote so seriously and without fail to us and to our work? He said it was he who was being enriched by this involvement and it was important for him, not only for us. There was no doubt that he meant

what he said.

But from where did this man acquire his deep and accurate understanding of the rural poor and of how they could move to change their lives? He said it was through his trade union work in Jaipur with radha Vallabhji, a senior cPM leader from whose wisdom and experience he had learned.

And from where did he think the key to social transformation in India itself could be found? He said that the key lay in the Vedas, as interpreted by his Guru, to whom he had made a commitment that he would write in English what he had learned from him. This was his life's main task.

Not only did this man deal as seriously with us as he did with the BIG political issues and problems the country was facing, nationally and internationally, as a journalist, political thinker and advisor to one Prime Minister after another, but he was also a builder of institutions which could carry on the tasks he believed were vital for the purpose. He put his trust in many who failed him and not once did he hold this against them or stand in judgement of them.

Many thought he was just an operator, a wily Brahmin opportunist who shifted loyalties from one political dispensation to another, from being a left-minded politician and journalist to joining forces with Dhirubhai Ambani. But as I knew and understood him, he never lost sight of the main goal—which was the best interest of the country as a whole. He would do everything in his power to further this interest—what would be good for India was his lodestar and its people were his anchor.

And finally, it was becoming clear to me towards the end of his magnificent life and after, that what he believed was good for India was not located in any particular ideology or party or sectional interest but in rediscovering and reviving the fundamentals of its civilisational ethos which lay in the Vedas as understood—and this is vital—by his Guru, and not in the interpretations by most scholars and savants of East and West who had not understood their real meaning.

What I am only now realising is that this understanding, which RK has written about in four published volumes, the fifth being 'incomplete' but titled 'The Whole Being,' is the basis of what RK himself stood for and indeed WAS in all his actions and at the core of his own being. There was in this thought and being, not dualism but one, interconnected integrity infusing the whole universe. Division and split was only apparent, what was real was unity.

I have not yet read his books and so comprehend this only dimly, but that it informed his fundermental approach to our work in Mehrauli and in Kashmir I realise only now.

And this I know: he was my dearest friend, my treasured guide and mentor; and even as I miss him sorely, his presence is all around me and gives me joy and strength

A DEVOTED DISCIPLE

Ravi Khanna

R.K. Mishra was a prolific writer and his works are enriched by decades of experience. his knowledge went way beyond the limits of his journalistic career. Much of his time was devoted to the study of the *Vedas* in Sanskrit under the guidance of the late Pandit Motilal Shastriji of Jaipur. He thus inherited the *Vedic* scholarship started by the late Pandit Madhusudan Ojha, the Guru of Motilal Shastriji in the early 1900s and handed down to him and from him to Mishraji. This was a study into the "insights" or the *vijnana-bhashya* or "scientific explanations" of the various *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads* of the *Vedas*. This tradition is unique both in its content and style. These "scientific treatises" have detailed explanations of the meaning and significance of each *mantra* of the principal *Upanishads*, cross-referenced with other *Vedic* texts. These lectures of Motilal Shastriji had attracted the attention of Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of independent India who was the chief patron and encouraged the publication of a large number of Shastriji's books. On the transition of Shastriji in 1960 at the early age of 52, Mishraji, in fulfillment of his promise to his Guru, took up the task of carrying this work forward in English in modern, scientific terms. The untimely passing away of Shastriji had left a vast cache of unpublished manuscripts and it fell on Mishraji's shoulders to have them preserved for posterity. Ojhaji and Shastriji had, between them, more than 233 books and over 80,000 pages of writings on the *Vedas*. In turn, Mishraji published four volumes in English detailing a large number of the hitherto not understood *Vedic* concepts and meanings in the light of contemporary science and metaphysics. These volumes are : *Before the Beginning and After the End: Rediscovering Ancient Insights; The Cosmic Matrix: In the Light of the Vedas; The Realm of Supraphysics—Mind, Matter, Energy;* and *The Ultimate Dialogue*. *Before the Beginning and After the End: Rediscovering Ancient Insights* was published, aptly, on *Guru Purnima*, 28July 1999. On this day of the Full Moon, it being summer in India, the Sun is the closest to us and consequently the energy of the high-tide waves in the ocean is at its annual peak. This book and the subsequent volumes have been dedicated to Pandit Motilal Shastriji. In the Introduction to this volume, Mishraji lays down the foundations of the work and of the volumes to follow. He discusses the evolution of western science from Newton to the 20th century breakthrough of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics and introduces the wave-particle duality. This scientific dilemma became evident when fundamental particle researchers discovered "energy resonances" in their particle accelerators that were identified as a veritable zoo of atomic particles. Mishraji sums up in the words of Thomas Kuhn, the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*—"Scientists cannot make any further headway, even given adequate resources"; Kuhn saw that "reality is ultimately unknowable and that any attempt to describe it obscures as much it illuminates". This made prominent western scientists looked towards 'Eastern mysticism' to solve their problems of language and concepts. Mishraji extracts from Sir James Means (*The Mysterious Vision*) and Erwin Schrodinger (*The Mystic Vision*)—"The reason given by the physicists for using the language of mysticism is that there is nothing in our ordinary language to which the events they observe in the particle accelerator may correspond. It is true, for example, that there is nothing in our language to correspond to the principle of complementarity: how can something be a wave

and a particle at the same time?" This was the advent of Metaphysics in the West and a sudden interest in and an opening out to the philosophy of the East. Mishraji next lays the foundation of the *Vedas* and shows how these works encapsulate both *vidya* and *vigyan*. And how both these are translated as 'science' by eminent western scholars and 'Indologists'. In fact, he points out that, "Some plainly ridiculous misinterpretations were handed down as translations of the original Sanskrit texts, all of which resulted in grave misunderstanding of the *Vedas* and caused confusion..." On the other hand, he also credits them: "We must also express our gratitude to a large number of western scholars who have continued to study the *Vedas*... But for the fact that commentaries, translations and other publications in the English language have been made available, the generations of Indians groomed in the colonial education system would have no opportunity to become acquainted with this ancient wisdom". Therefore, Mishraji took upon himself the onerous task, in all these volumes, to correct these misinterpretations wherever possible and to come up with improved English language versions. For example, he explains, that *'Vi'* as a prefix denotes 'movement' and therefore *vigyan* is the jnana or knowledge of all the external vibrations of the Universe. On the other hand *vidya* is the information of the divya region that is beyond the visible but can be accessed only by the 'brightness' of the mind or '*mana*'. Thus, whereas *vigyan* deals with external knowledge and its measurement, *vidya* "deals with the factors, principles and processes which lie behind natural phenomena" i.e., it is internal, interpretive and non-measurable. Another important contribution Mishraji has made through these volumes is to eradicate the deliberate distortions of those translators "serving the interests of British colonialism and lending support to the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries". He explains at the outset of his first volume how "Max Muller made three assertions: 1. The *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the *Vedas*, was composed around 1200 BC; 2. The *Rig Veda* is a work of the Aryans; and 3. The Aryans were a foreign race of people who invaded India and subjugated the indigenous people. Overwhelming evidence is now available to the effect that each of these propositions is utterly untenable. However, so deep has their impact been and so strong the support they received from entrenched vested interests, that these falsehoods hold sway even today". It is indeed extremely difficult to quantify the extent of Mishraji's scholarship in these writings or to do justice to them in a limited space. But the best approach would be to choose some pearls from this vast treasure house. Explaining the structure of the Four *Vedas* viz. *Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva*, Mishraji first gives us the extent of the *Veda Shastra* or the entire extent of the branches of the *Vedic* knowledge. There are a total of fourteen branches. The main four *Vedas* have six *Vedangas* or auxiliary texts : *shiksha* (phonetics), *vyakarana* (grammar), *chhands* (meter), *nirukta* (etymology), *kalpa* (real life applications of rituals and rites) and *jyotisha* (astronomy/ astrology). This makes it ten so far. The four *Vedas* are *shruti* texts i.e. they precipitated as *mantras* into the minds of the meditating rishis and the rest that follow are all *smriti* texts, i.e., they were developed in the minds of the subsequent scholars and then committed to memory. The balanced four are *Meemamsa* (directs the practitioner in putting the *Vedic* rituals into practice), *Nyaya* (logic), *Puranas* (metaphorical myths & ancient anthologies) and *Dharmashastra* (doctrine of duties & law of the land). These, then, are the fourteen branches of Indian tradition. [Mishraji then outlines a subsequent four more practical, everyday life *vidya*s bringing the total to eighteen in all viz.: *Ayurveda* (the science of healthcare), *arthashastra* (knowledge of political practices & economy), *Dhanurveda* (warfare) and *Gandharva Veda* (the practice of music).] Mishraji, quoting his grand-guru Ojhaji, also corrects the categorization of the six *darshanas* or schools of philosophy made by western scholars. These schools evolved as a cross

discussion to "satisfy the enquiries which arise in people's minds." Instead of the popular translations categorizing the six philosophical systems as *Purva-Meemamsa, Uttara-Meemamsa, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya and Yoga*, the correct version should be *Charvaka; Baudha;Jain; Vaisheshika; Samkhya and Vedanta (and Srimad Bhagwad Gita)*. At the beginning of each volume, Mishraji outlines different aspects of the speech used in Sanskrit scholarship. Each Veda has a phonetic treatise attached to it called *Pratishakhya* that, with meticulous care, gives the pronunciation, rules of prosody and accentuation of the *shabdas* or the words of the *mantras*. To quote, "Words in Sanskrit are living organisms. They grow from a root, like a plant As it grows, with the addition of prefixes and suffixes, it acquires new dimensions and numerous facets." This leads to understanding the spoken words: "Indian seer-scientists have discussed in detail whether the relation between a linguistic term (*shabda*) and its meaning (*artha*) is permanent or a human invention. They maintain that a linguistic item is not merely the sound but that unit or symbol which, when articulated, brings about the notion of the meaning." Thus the power of the metaphor is largely used in the *Vedas* and what seems a story or myth at the primary level is deep philosophy as its etymology unfolds. This often happens after repeatedly chanting the *mantras* and as the perspicacity of the student alters with experience and age i.e. the *awastha*. Mishraji writes further: "*mantras* do not openly express or explain. They reveal their 'message' by means of their indicative meaning and in so doing, guide us to the Truth." Therefore, the *Vedas* are divided into increasing layers of intricacy. The initial collection of *mantras* is the Samhita and the last of the philosophical extracts is the *Vedanta* or *Upanishads*. The root verbs grow into the *shabda*s and in the words of Mishraji, "If the *mantra* or Samhita is the tree, then the *Brahmana* is the flower, the *Aranyaka* is the fruit (in its unripe stage) and the *Upanishads* are the mellow or fully ripened fruits." This essentially lays the basis of the structure of Sanskrit as an ancient language that is as intricate as pure mathematics. This fact is recognized by the father of modern Metaphysics—Fritjof Capra in his famous book, *The Tao of Physics*. In the chapter titled "The Parallels," he places the equations of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity on one side and the *mantras* of *Rig Veda*, with all their phonetic accents, on the other and asks the question, "Are these two streams of knowledge equivalent even though separated by 5000 years?" Mishraji touches upon the uniqueness of the structure of the Sanskrit language in *Before the Beginning and After the End*. He explains how the words have various layers of meaning which change with the perspicacity of the scholar. Using the *Bindu* as a remarkable example, he shows how it can be derived from the word *indu* to mean "a bright drop; a spark" or it can be derived from the root *bhid* to mean a "hole"; yet, in the *Shiv Sutras*, it is a dimensionless point that gives birth to the entire creation. Talking further about the nature of sound, Mishraji explains 'the distinction between the word (*shabda*) and the sound (*dhwani*)' as akin to the body and the soul. Motilal Shastriji, in his scientific treatise on the *Shatpatha Brahmana*, explains that there are two ways to look at the energy of *nada* (sound energies)—first, the *mantras* unfold the sound energies as we view outwards from the Earth and talk to each other. This view is termed *bhugolik* or earth-centric and our speech is called *vaak*. If we look from the heavens downwards, filtering the cacophony, we hear the natural sounds or what is called *dhwani* or music. And this view is termed *khagolik*. Thus *vaani* is the 'words that are sung' and it is both *vaak* and *dhvani* put together. This is the Divine Song. Mishraji talks about the "Supraphysical Universe" in his first book, *Before the Beginning and after the End* and then subsequently devotes the entire third book, *The Realm of Supraphysics* to exploring the Supraphysical. It is the realm that gives us an "extra-sensory" awareness. Any object or *pinda* has an emanation or *mahima* around it that is subtler in energy and this is the

"Supraphysical" dimension of that object. He links the knowledge of an object, according to the *Vedas*, at three levels viz.:, first is the knowledge gained through the senses—*Rig Veda*; second is the knowledge gained through the mind—*Sama Veda*—and; third is the knowledge gained through the soul, *Atma—Yajur Veda*. Mishraji explains the further sub-division of the *mahima* as five groups of *prana* or life-force energy. He clearly establishes the basic *Vedic* premise that each microcosm is a replica of the entire macrocosm, one can be aware of anything in this Universe just by delving into one's own consciousness. This leads to an understanding of the method of performing the *yajnas* and the sacrifices to *agni*, the sacred fire. The "Supraphysical" energies are variously enhanced and these are the *devatas* or the semi-Gods that control various powers. This knowledge clearly touches upon the paranormal and the power of the *mantras* over the physical world. Consciousness is another subject that Mishraji has covered extensively in his writings. In the *The Cosmic Matrix*, talking about 'The Universe of Modern Science', Mishraji writes, "Many theoretical physicists believe that in fact all the laws of physics are unified and several acknowledge that the phenomenon of mind and consciousness actually do exist. The signals from the *Vedas* could be of profound significance for such people." To date, the main dilemma of Quantum Physics remains the *wave* and *particle* duality of matter. In 1950s Erwin Schrodinger, one of the main exponents of Quantum Mechanics, who was a great believer in the *Upanishads*, wrote in his book, *Mind and Matter*, "The reason why our sentient, percipient and thinking ego is met nowhere within our scientific world picture can easily be indicated in seven words: because it is itself that world picture....There is obviously only one alternative, namely the unification of minds or consciousnesses. Their multiplicity is only apparent, in truth there is only one mind. This is the doctrine of the *Upanishads*." In another book *What is Life?*, he went on to say, "The only possible alternative is simply to keep to the immediate experience that consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown; that there is only one thing and that what seems to be a plurality is merely a series of different aspects of this one thing, produced by a deception (the Indian Maya) ; the same illusion is produced in a gallery of mirrors, and in the same way Gaurishanker and Mount Everest turned out to be the same peak seen from different valleys.".... "Dating back some 2500 years or more from the early great *Upanishads* the recognition ATMAN = BRAHMAN (the personal self equals the omnipresent, all- comprehending eternal self) was, in Indian thought, considered, far from blasphemous, to represent the quintessence of deepest insight into the happenings of the world." According to the author, the *Brahman* is the Unknown and only its reflection can be understood as *Ishwara*. The Atman at the other end, manifests as the *jeeva*. The realm of the "Supraphysical" is the 'Mind' of the Supreme Consciousness, *Brahman*, while the play of the individual consciousness is the brain and its entanglement within the space-time continuum. When the sentient being analyses with his senses, he perceives simultaneously both the external and internal dichotomy of the Universe. On the 'outside', he can observe the 'four' realms of *Vedas* viz. *Atharva, Shukla-Yaju, Krishan-Yaju* and the *Rik*. The emanations of this knowledge converge as it moves 'outwards' into the cosmos and the night sky. On the 'inside' this reflects as the *Sama Veda* which gives rise to both the mental layers of consciousness as well as the five *koshas* that support the physical body of the *jeeva*. The emanations of *Sama* appear to expand as they move forward in the *chit-akasha* or the infinite 'imaginary' space of the individual mind. Mishraji further explains in *The Ultimate Dialogue:* "Although the mind is sentient by nature, it appears as a conscious agent capable of knowing and functioning due to its contact with *Atma*.... It is indivisible, without limbs or parts, and is thus unlimited. It has no attributes, being neither harmonious, contradictory nor spontaneous and divisions arise in it

suddenly." These apparent divisions of the *anthaha-karna* (self- consciousness) are *mana* (mind or brain), *ahamkara*(ego or the 'seat of the self'), *buddhi* (intellect) and *ananda* (supra-mind) at an individual level. All this is supported by the physical body and the brain in the material realm that is termed *bhootakasha*. The energies of the Supreme Mind are collective. These are invoked by the *mantras* of the 'external' *Vedas* and are called *Vaishwanara, Taijasa, Prajna* and *Turiya*. This constitutes a higher order of infinite than the *chit-akaska* of the individual mind[1] and is therefore called *chid-akasha*. *Vak* or speech therefore is the outward expression of our inner self-energy. It precipitates through the layers of our consciousness as *para, pashyanti, madhyama* and *vaikhari*. The acronym of these four states is *pranav* that is the sum total of all words. The opposite of this is *aum* and is the involution or drawing inwards of all these energies, hence it is the universal *mantra*. The entire creation closes in on this 'sound' and it is also the *pratyahara*[2] of the names of the four *Vedas—Atharva, Yajur, Rig and Sama*, thus representing the entire gamut of the Universe. Mishraji has made an invaluable contribution to the lineage of scholarship of Ojhaji and Motilal Shastriji. He has knitted the concepts so brilliantly in an intricate, contemporary tapestry of words that, paradoxically, at the end, one still feels desirous for more—beyond *The Ultimate Dialogue*. [1] *See Cantor's Theory of Infinities in 'Infinity and the Mind'—by Rudy Rucker* [2] *The first and the last letter of a sequence of names—a common practice in Vedic literature as explained by Panini*

MISHRAJI'S RELATIONSHIP WITH AVATAR ADI DA

Rajesh Alreja, Leo Burke, James Steinberg & Sonia Lal

Spirituality

'Atman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas,
or by intelligence, or by much hearing of sacred
books. It is attained by him alone whom It chooses.
To such a one Atman reveals Its own form.'

—Katha Upanishad

And so it was clearly shown in the life of Sri Rishi Kumar Mishra. His principal spiritual teachers came to him seemingly out of nowhere, in various times in his life in order to guide, to bless, to heal and to serve his process of realization. Destined to live a remarkable career in the world and destined as well to serve causes that exceed the ordinary purposes of the world, Mishra ji somehow attracted the greatest among men. His need to realize the ultimate truth that is the purpose of a human birth and that is beyond partial viewpoints associated him with religious teachers, spiritual masters and pundits from a wide range of religious and philosophical persuasions.

It was in this context that a spiritual relationship of profound depth and meaning began spontaneously one day in Mishra ji's life, as he was contacted by a disciple of a divinely realized being. Mishra ji began an intensive study of the spiritual writings and audio-video discourses of Parama-Sapta-Na Adi Da Samraj, the Hridaya Avatar and Incarnation of Divinity. Mishra ji came to acknowledge Adi Da as a spiritual master of extraordinary depth and profundity, as well as his own guru (Pt. Motilalji Shastri) whom he wished to serve in the remaining years of his life. Mishra ji wrote from India directly to Adi Da in Fiji, who responded to him through verbal communications as well as in vivid dreams of discussion and Blessing.

Adi Da was given all of Mishra ji's published books: *The Realm of Supraphysics, The Cosmic Matrix, Before the Beginning and After the End,* and *The Ultimate Dialogue*. Adi Da had reviewed hundreds of thousands of books in His lifetime and created *The Basket of Tolerance*, an annotated bibliography of approximately 15,000 summaries of books, CDs and DVDs on the cultural, philosophical and spiritual endeavors of humanity. Adi Da acknowledged the depth of Mishra ji's writings and placed his works in a select list of approximately 1,500 books known as 'The Epitome of Seventh-Stage and Traditional Esotericism'.

In August 2008, Adi Da sent his *padukas*(wooden shoes), empowered with His Spiritual Blessings, to India. Mishra ji accepted an invitation to attend the installation ceremony of Adi Da's holy *padukas* but what occurred when he entered the meditation hall was a completely unexpected and mysterious deepening of heart-intimacy between guru and devotee. Mishra ji performed the guru-*paduka puja* and installation ceremony himself, assisted by his wife, Renuka ji. In a world where our cultural and spiritual values are being quickly lost to the forces of modernization, Mishra ji's spontaneous expression of love and honour

for the time-honoured tradition of guru-devotion were deeply inspiring.

The bond of divine intimacy that formed on that day between the master and the disciple had great import for Adi Da's work with India. Mishra ji began receiving instructions from Adi Da in his dreams and wrote to Him directly, asking for guidance about how to serve His Work in India.

Adi Da said: 'My Work is universal. It is world-Work. It is a new Work. It is Avataric Work, and so it does not have a 'home' culture. I do not have a 'home' culture.. .The Divine intrinsically stands apart and is prior to all modes of human tradition, all the projections humanity has extended towards the sense of the Divine. The Divine itself cannot be assimilated, cannot be compartmentalized, or owned and forced to inhabit the housing of local deities. It has nothing to do with that. [Adidam Ruchiradam] is not playing upon the great path of return that is intrinsic to the structure of the body-mind - gross, subtle and causal. It is not about using that structure to attain Realization. It is about standing prior to the structure and therefore prior to egoity and the search and all the techniques associated with the search. Prior egolessness is the essence of the Way of Adidam Ruchiradam.' (Excerpt from Adi Da's extensive instructions to Mishra ji.)

In response, Mishra ji wrote, 'I am truly overwhelmed by Bhagwan's profound response to my letter. It is a comprehensive and incisive discourse elucidating the nature of Adi Da's advent and presence and explains the importance and nature of His work to be done in India and the world (and in the cosmos). It has helped me realize how His teachings take the great ancient traditions forward, not by negating them, but towards their fulfillment.'

World Peace

Mishra ji was loved and respected by a wide variety of people. This should come as no surprise, since he had such a diverse set of interests. More importantly, he displayed the capacity to thoughtfully listen to others and empathize with their concerns. As a result of his intellectual curiosity, combined with his genuine concern for the world, many came to seek his counsel, advice and insight.

There were two areas of abiding interest to Mishra ji— geopolitics and spirituality. He saw a melding of there of Adi Da's preeminent social wisdom text, *Not-Two Is Peace*. The first section of this seminal book contains a set of principles that assess our current condition and calls for the formation of a new structure, a Global Cooperative Forum, based on *prior unity*. Such a forum would give voice to all of humankind and provide a vehicle for addressing the pressing issues we have in common. We remember one evening in particular where Mishra ji spoke about *Not-Two Is Peace* with great delight.

Mishra ji agreed with Adi Da's assessment: 'The old moral, social and political order of humankind is now dead. This is the moment when it will be decided what the future is going to be.' Mishra ji was deeply concerned that the world had entered a period of political and economic turmoil. He was apprehensive that the looming environmental crisis might reach unmanageable proportions and render the earth unable to provide enough food or fresh water for its inhabitants.

Of equal concern was an awareness that the growing discrepancy between the rich and the poor was neither just nor sustainable. He noted that the growing rise of global corporations contributed to the gap between those who have much and

those who have little. Similarly, Adi Da writes, 'The power of wealth—extended through corporations as well as through individuals—is used to acquire goods, power and territory outside of the domain of the culture, or the nation-state, or the alliance of nation-states.. The power of wealth is upsetting the balance of how things were and is having a dramatic effect on the global system.'

An historical example of this 'upsetting the balance', Mishra ji noted, was the period of British colonial rule where millions died in famines and the country was impoverished economically, culturally and spiritually. More broadly, he saw that the entire world had now succumbed to a type of cultural colonization that relies on competition and consumerism, rather than cooperation and simplicity.

Adi Da speaks of this forcefully in Not-Two Is Peace: 'The current situation is one of global competition relative to the acquisition of goods and competition for power. There is no control over the excesses of competition, no force that speaks for the whole and subordinates all to the good of the whole. This lack of control over competition is affecting not only the environment but every level of human life. There is no over-arching principle that would act as a discipline so that the will to consumption and the activities of consumers are prevented from destroying the very system on which everybody is depending for life.'

This led to an interesting conversation about how societies managed themselves before the rise of the nation-state. Mishra ji, so well versed in Indian history, pointed out how segments of India managed to develop cooperative, sustainable arrangements for the conduct of human affairs in past millennia. Such arrangements were usually characterized by the development of intimate, trusting relationships. Mishra ji saw Adi Da's Vision of the Global Cooperative Forum as one that could restore humankind to a way of living that encouraged freedom, cultural expression, positive social development and the honoring of traditional wisdom. He remarked, 'That Adi Da has given his blessing to the Global Cooperative Forum is a great grace. This is a great initiative.'

Blessings

'In the world, the beloved dies—or appears to die. Whatever is desired or loved that is merely conditional will inevitably die, or pass away and change. One who observes this with true seriousness realizes that this Lesson of life requires that you find What is Deathless in others. True Love is devoted and submitted and attached and conformed to the Undying Beloved. This principle, in brief, characterizes the Way of the Heart.'—Avatar Adi Da Samraj.

Mishra ji was diagnosed with cancer a few years before he died, and those last few years were a time of great challenge to his health. True to his character he ventures in to a search for cure—both conventional and alternative treatment options. When the doctors found lesions in his liver, they thought he had very little time left, but they were proven wrong. Mishra ji lived much longer than they expected. Prayers and meditation, faith, and divine blessings provided the openness for such a miracle to occur. Both Mishra ji and Renuka ji were engaged in intense spiritual practices, invoking divine help from the depths of their heart and this was vital to the process of healing and transformation they were going through.

Their friends, family and spiritual communities provided a strong network of support and prayers during this time. Adi Da gave His Blessings to Mishra ji many

times in the last few years. Every few weeks, Renuka ji gave an update on his health to Adi Da, who would look at Mishra ji's photograph while receiving the update and give His Love and Blessings. Often, He would sprinkle holy water on Mishra ji's photographs, which were then returned to Mishra ji as prasad. We noticed that during his health crisis, Mishra ji seemed to be in very positive spirits. He did not seem to fall into depression or lose hope, which is the natural response to being diagnosed with cancer. His will to live in order to accomplish his mission on earth was very strong and this was something that we were all inspired by.

Adi Da sent His Love and Blessings to Mishra ji, expressing His compassionate regard for his health and also encouraged him to more intensively engage in the great process to realize the highest spiritual truth.

Adi Da calls everyone to the deathless condition--fearless freedom, happiness and peace beyond the body-mind. He has said, 'No matter what arises—whether as or in the state of waking, or of dreaming, or of sleeping—you Are the actionless, and formless, and thought-free mere Witness of attention itself, and of every apparent 'object' of attention, and of any and every state of 'experience', and of the entirety of whatever and all that arises.'

One day when we asked Mishra ji how he was doing, he smiled and said 'It is just the body that is suffering.' Renuka ji said that this was very close to what Mishra ji said just before he passed away. What Grace, to be able to be in such a state even in the last days of one's life. May such Divine Grace continue to unfold in the lives of all beings.

MISHRAJI AS VEDIC INTERPRETER

Kapil Kapoor

R. K. Mishra ji is perhaps the only one in recent times to repay, in the hoary *guru-s isya parampara*, his debt of learning to his teacher. His formidable intellectual work is the fulfillment of his teacher's last moment injunction to disseminate in English, for the skeptical educated Indians, Vedic thought as expounded by him. Such devotion to the Guru reminds one of Uddalaka Arum. The tradition says that the guru gives a parting message to the pupil at the completion of his studies. One such message is found in the *Siksavalli* section of the *Taittiriya Upanisad* as noted by Mishra ji himself in his 2006 'Homage to the Guru', which must be considered his 'Ultimate Homage', as it appears in his *Ultimate Dialogue*. Part of that message is—'... give the teacher a gift of what is dear to him'. The disciple's work is the gift to him 'who opened my eyes with the fine collyrium stick of knowledge/to him my teacher...'

In each of his three books, he acknowledges the teacher and the tradition. Dedicating to his teacher's teacher the 2001 book, *The Cosmic Matrix*, Mishra ji lays down the task and the challenge of Vedic scholarship —'rescuing the ancient insights of the seer-scientists from the rubble of ignorance and misinterpretations.' Pandit Madhusudan Ojhaji and Pandit Motilal Shastri ji, assuming that Vedas are codified knowledge, developed a methodology of interpretation that enabled the unraveling of meanings that do not lie on the surface—are in fact concealed by an apparently simple, transparent discourse, a discourse that does not seem to make rational sense in terms of the known schemas of human knowledge.

That has been the fact about Vedas from the earliest days—the ascertainment of meaning. We are told about the materialist skeptics such as those who, faced with the varying degrees of opacity in the Vedas, concluded that the Vedic utterances are meaningless. Any text for that matter tends to pose problems of interpretation and tends to grow opaque over a period of time triggering the interpretive exercise. The task of interpretation is three-fold:

- too determine and explain the meaning of the text;
- to establish the relevance and significance of, and sometimes to amend, the rules of conduct or the significance of a thesis when these grow out of tune with either the usage or the knowledge of the time and,
- to re-contextualize or articulate the rationale and/or the rationality of the assertions and that way, defend against counter philosophies or objections.

Basically what sets the interpretive process in motion, therefore, is not just

the symbolic and the seemingly irrational text alone but also the *ambiguous*, the *contradictory*, the apparently *meaningless* and *controversial* propositions or ideas. Apart from this, the very nature of Indian intellectual discourse, a product of the oral culture, demands explicatory commentary. Indian texts as oral texts are a disembodied storehouse of:

- de-contextualized statements
- in complex and abbreviated syntax
- made terse through devices of economy such as class- markers, meta-terms, technical terminology, understood repetition and ellipsis, etc., and more importantly,
- unlike contemporary Western texts, statements of conclusions and not descriptions of the processes 'this (the author's) own mind has gone through in arriving at the doctrine,'
- organized in an intricate thematic (or topic) organization, and
- at least in the sruti-literature, expressed in symbolic language.

Thus Vedic exegesis has faced the overwhelming problem of interpretation because of the nature of its discourse. Vedas are composed in what is called *sandhyabhasa*, a 'twilight' language fluctuating between concrete and abstract, mundane and divine, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial, ordinary and extra-ordinary. *Manusmrti* notes (1.3.1, 1.2.11, 2.1.1) that *s abda* (in Veda) is the root/origin of *dharma* and in Veda, language is *rupat prayat*, metaphorical, and in fixing the meaning its intended meaning (*bhavartha*) is to be grasped, not its referential meaning—*bhutarthavadas* being few and far between—and that reasoning (*anumana*) is only one of the means of grasping this meaning. The text is all through polysemous. Bhart.rhari shows in *Vakyapadiya* (1.8) how the same *s ruti* text is variously grasped to support different competing systems.

For all these reasons, the Vedic discourse has given birth to a multiplicity of schools, approaches and methods of interpretation. Modern European interpreters are divided into two schools-one regarding the *Rg-Veda* as predominantly an Indo-European document rather than strictly Indian and, as such, demanding the basis of comparative philology and comparative mythology. With this methodology they re-construct *Rg-Vedic* society as a primitive and tribal community with very little valid knowledge. The traditional commentators and their readings are of no value in this approach as thinkers such as Yaska and Sayana appear as mere ritualists and their exercise of etymological method in the *yajna* context is not acceptable to them. Indian scholars however attach due importance to traditions of ritual and in ascertaining the meanings of words, bridging gaps etc., rely on internal evidence as against comparative evidence. In modern India also, several attempts at Vedic exegesis have been made. Some of them, such as the one by the Arya Samaj thinkers represented a reaction to uncritical and unjust attacks on the Vedas by ill-

informed foreigners of the early 19th century. The other School, the Pondicherry School, is represented by its chief exponent, Sri Aurobindo for whom Veda is mystic and symbolic poetry. Ananda Coomaraswamy considers Veda as mystic and symbolic but symbolic representation of a physical tradition. These two schools, the Arya Samaj and Pondicherry, seek to build on both reason and mystic faith.

It is important to remember that reasoned interpretation is not a gift of the West—it had in fact, originated with Ya-ska himself: 'Concerning the *mantras,/i>, none can claim to have perceived their truths if one is not a seer... When seers passed beyond, man asked the gods, 'who are going to be seers for us?' To them the gods gave reason as the seer. And hence, whatever one speaks with reason, following the track of the work, becomes as good as the utterances of a seer...' (Nirukta. XIII. 12, 13)*

We need not go into the major Schools here apart from noting that some kind of history, actuality of events narrated in Vedas has always been accepted by Indian thinkers. The starting point of Ojha ji's interpretation is his assumption that Vedas are a knowledge text, an all-time true sas'vata, and this knowledge exists as an undifferentiated whole.

This knowledge embodied in the Vedic discourse can be understood only if we approach the problem of interpretation with a penetrative insight, the ability to envisage the perception and the thought process that lies behind the verbal construct. For this, a kind of historical sense is also needed to understand how thought about a given object of cognition can grow over immense stretches of time and space, a growth that in fact is a process of turning deeper and deeper into the nature of the reality of that object and reaching a 'transcendental' understanding beyond the co-ordinates of time and space and beyond the trichotomy of subject-object-instrument. A proper interpretive technique founded on correct assumptions about the nature of experience embodied in these texts is, therefore, needed. The western hypothesis of evolution over time, which helps arrange forms in time, but fails to capture the timeless reality that informs the forms obstructs the correct vision of what is described in the texts. What is coded in the mantra portions of these texts is an exposition of the inner realities, of reality as it is experienced in the consciousness, of the images that the external reality projects on our consciousness. Consciousness (or awareness or comprehension) of this essential realty is described these days as 'religious experience'. Among the forms that are cognized in this ocean of reality, there are those that are projected as gods. The Vedic theory of gods as names of the same one indivisible reality is not therefore an expression of a primitive mind, as the western Evolutionists have assumed, but an explanation of 'a supernormal fact', of a reality that can be experienced only in a heightened state of consciousness in which the mind becomes an acutely sensitive instrument. It is comprehended through a process that has been compared to a flash of lightning (Kenopanisad, IV4). This 'reality', once cognized, cannot be

expressed in ordinary language, which is intrinsically discrete, sequential and 'concrete'. The Vedic seer, therefore, like all poets, took recourse to symbolism to embody this reality. Symbolism transforms the abstraction of the cognition into concrete images. The reader has to 'paraphrase' or decode them. But decoding the ancient symbols that embody mystical and often occult experience is an extremely difficult if not an impossible task. The interpreter has to traverse in reverse sequence the cognitive process of the seer who encapsulated the meaning, an intellectual exercise that involves extraordinary mental operations.

Pt. Madhusudan Ojha ji and after him his disciple Pt. Motilal Shastri ji, working with this conception of the object texts and the method of decoding them broke new ground in giving a 'scientific' description of srstivijnana, the theory of creation paraphrasing the original insights of Vedic seers in the language of familiar modern science.

R.K.Mishra ji, in that tradition of Vedic exegesis, completely imbued with his teachers understanding and inheriting their knowledge, extended the discourse by engaging western scholars in a debate about their reading of some key Vedic concepts. In The Cosmic Matrix, Mishra ji explains the legacy of his teachers and his intellectual debt to them and the task he chose to perform. By redefining the key terms, tatva-s as Mishra ji calls them, of the Vedic thought system such as yajna, vijnana, stotra, itihasa, Pt. Madhusudan Ojha ji gave important Vedic mantra-s new explanations that caused uneasiness because the logic of those explanations that must have been at one time self evident was now inexplicable, following the loss of many auxiliary sciences (listed in Chandogya Upanisad). The explanations of these fundamental categories are scattered across the texts and have to be reconstituted by a sahrdaya scholar. This is what Pandit Madhusudan Ojha ji did.

Ojha ji wrote in Sanskrit and therefore his ideas were accessed by only a small readership. But the method and the conclusions need to be validated in a disputation, vada, with modern thinkers both Indian and Western—particularly Western scholars whose work is driven by the imperative of establishing Indian civilization as primitive and 'unscientific', whatever that means. Pt. Motilal Shastri ji increased the reach of Ojhaji's ideas among Indian scholars by composing explanatory lectures/commentaries on them in Hindi.

And, near his end, he asked Mishra ji to 'continue' his work. He has done this by making Ojha ji's thinking, as transmitted to him by Pt. Motilal Shastri ji, available to Western and Indian scholars who work in the English language, by writing his explanatory commentaries in English in the form of his four books. He has also adopted Ojha ji's approach of explaining the meaning of Vedic texts by expounding major terms of that thought - jnana, vijnana, yajna,aksara, Brahman, purusa, prakrti, atma, pram, pas'u, vak, Veda, dars'ana, Is'wara, maya and interestingly avyaya.

In the last book he completed, he dwells at length on the Hindu theory of knowledge. He expounds jnana, karma, bhakti, the three paths, the instruments of knowledge—karma and jnana indriyan, mana, buddhi citta—the knower and object of knowledge, j-va and Is'vara. These dense concepts, particularly the two, Brahman and Karma, are elucidated as terms of the ultimate dialogue, the Bhagvadgita as explained by Ojha ji and as understood by Mishra ji himself.

We may conclude this note by briefly looking at the method Mishra ji employs to give new, challenging explanations. It is a method he inherited from his teacher, but which he has honed, particularly the comparative inflection he brings to bear on the objects of inquiry. In the process many cobwebs knitted by western scholars and their Indian faithfuls are cleared and the reader ends with a fresh, logical, convincing understanding. Take for example, the concept of maya. Whole generations of Indian scholars have been brought up on 'jagat mithya Brahma satya' as the keystone of Adi S ankara's thought reducing perhaps the best human mind to the status of a non-perceptive thinker who says that the perceptible world is unreal. This stems from the classic untrue equation of maya and 'unreal' (and of mithya- and 'illusion'). Mishra ji primarily works within the universe of Vedic texts and their vocabulary and eschews completely the 'translation' method (often wrongly termed as 'comparative'). He begins his investigation, in the niravacana tradition, with etymology deriving the conceptual word maya from dhatu ma meaning 'to measure, to quantify, or to limit' (The Cosmic Matrix p.195). This defines maya as an entity that is an attribute of the 'real', of what is. Then, in the Upani — adic - Buddhist mode, the entity is defined as a series of apparent contradictions as'... not non-existent. yet it is not existent.it is neither different from consciousness nor identical to it.it is not composite.yet it does not lack parts.' (The Cosmic Matrix p.196). This puts maya in the class of apurva categories—and there are many such in the Vedic intellectual tradition—non-perceptible, to be experienced only in one's self but nonetheless real in that they have explanatory power and help us make sense of a wide range of phenomena such as the multiple, ever-changing perceptible world that is logically a reflex of one underlying principle. Next, in order to affirm it, Mishra ji frames this category in the context of the whole Vedic thought system. He posits a configuration of rasa-bala-maya, an unusual conjunction, to describe its nature. Rasa is the 'ocean' of reality (Rgveda X.164.45), bala, Mishra ji explains, is the energy inherent in this 'pulsating' matter and ma-ya- is that dimension of energy that constitutes multiple forms which then become perceptible and are named by words. After all, even appearance is a construct and all constructs are the result of some form of energy. He then delves deep into the subtle sub categories such as name, form, quantity, system and their content. The analysis of what the concepts stand for is essentially an investigation into word-meaning and draws on the long tradition of linguistic reflection.

It is interesting that a modern, rationalist method of interpretation that

leans heavily on reasoning has linkages with 9th Century B.C.E Yaska, the composer of Nirukta, who was the first to formulate principles of interpretation for Vedic exegesis and organized for the first time a whole system of interpretation. Mishra ji's method makes use of the following instruments:

A. The Interpreter's belief system
- *1. sarvabhaumasiddhanta*
  (the meta-assumption)

B. Verbal testimony
- *2. s'ruti*
- *3. dars'ana-smrti*

C. General Rules of Interpretation
- *4. sangati (coherence)*
  (judgement from common experience)

D. Language
- *5. nirvacana (etymology)*
- *6. vyakarm (grammar)*
- *7. s'abda-s'akti*
  (lexical and propositional meaning including verbal symbolism).

Typically as an interpreter of polyvalent philosophical texts, Mishra ji searches for mula-siddhanta, the core meaning of the text in accordance with the assumption of the sampradaya to which they subscribe. The small sample analysed here does not give examples, but it is evident that itihasa —purarn drstanta, loka nyaya (popular and learned rules of interpretation) and vyakaran a, grammar have an important place in Mishra ji's rules of interpretation.

How much impact this 'defense' of Veda shall have on Vedic scholarship depends on factors other than just academic—that is why Mishra ji chose to directly engage the western interpreters. There is in fact a sustained on-going siege of Hindu intellectual systems by western scholars and only a sustained defense can counter this and defend the Hindu civilization. It is necessary therefore to institutionalize this tradition of scholarship to which Mishra ji belonged.

HIS LAST BOOK: NOT UNFINISHED?

Renu Baveja

I came in contact with Mishraji sometime in 1987 and worked with him closely for a year and a half when he was the Chairman, Observer Group of Publications. During this period, I got to discover his other side of life, his true being. This year also marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. I was initiated by Mishraji. One year of extensive studies and his personal guidance opened new horizons. He introduced me to myself and helped me stand on my two feet so that I could walk on my own into the new world. I left *Observer* in 1992. Many years went by and I met him only twice. Probably, it was not required anymore. The seed was sown and his absence was never felt. Even today, when he has left his body, I see no change. For me, he is still there .even more there than earlier. He has gone beyond the limits of his mind and body and has emerged even stronger in his real form.

I am told that he has left his fifth book unfinished. Before leaving, he announced his departure to Renukaji. It was a conscious decision. Then how could he have left his work undone?

I have not read this book but I am given to understand that this book deals with the fragmented mind and its journey towards the 'whole being'. We are not what we appear to be and what we are we do not appear to be. We appear to be the fragmented mind, but this is only on the surface for, underneath, we carry the 'Universal Being'. The entire aim of our life is to discover our true being, our Whole Being. Before leaving, through his books, he has helped us make a new beginning in our lives and, possibly, may have left his last book open-ended as it was not meant to be summed up. It has not been written because it could not be written. This was a decision of not just Mishraji but of his Whole Being. By leaving it 'unfinished', he has left a big question mark in our lives. The true seekers of life will attempt to engage with this question and answer it with their lives. The remaining part has been left to us to write it on ourselves, to action it in our lives, to be that and to discover our "Whole Being".

How do we do this? This task has to be taken up seriously and in fact with the same seriousness with which he wrote all his books in the later period of his life. He is there, limitless, boundless and fully available to us to make this happen. We all ^ know that it is the body that goes, the soul never dies. If we want, we can keep the soul alive and allow it to nurture our being. Open up to him and you shall see his working. If we love him then we shall not let the work of such a powerful soul go in vain. We owe it to him in action and spirit.

Knowledge, he has given to us in abundance. His unfinished book carries a hidden meaning, leaving it to each one of us to understand it in our own way. To me, it means that the time has come on the earth to translate all the knowledge we have into action. Discover our 'Whole Being' and allow it to live its natural life. This is the sole purpose of our existence and our very destiny.

To experience the power and boundlessness of our dear Mishraji, one will have to be ready to transcend the boundaries of our fragmented mind and embark upon the journey of the 'unknown' with his known hand. Here alone we shall find the fulfillment of our being and the being of the great soul. He is here and shall continue to live till eternity for not just knowledge but ''Knowledge in Action'.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

MISHRA UNCLE: A REMEMBRANCE

Mukesh Ambani

How time flies! I cannot believe that so many months have gone by since the day uncle—as i always called Mishraji with a combination of affection and respect—passed away. My mind and heart still refuse to accept his departure. How truly has it been said: "To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die"?

Uncle was dear to me in many ways, for many reasons. The biggest reason, of course, was that he was dear to my father, and my father is the person who has had the greatest and everlasting influence on my life. The values that my father espoused became my values in life. The people whom my father trusted, I trusted. I too valued the wise counsel of people whose advice my father valued. And, during my growing phase, no other person outside my family, but close to my father, provided as much guidance to me as Mishra uncle did.

What made the bond between my father and Mishra Uncle strong was their shared passion for India. It started in the early 1970s. Papa had not yet become famous and had not reached the level of success he achieved later. Mishra Uncle was already an experienced journalist then, but his most fruitful and active years in public life were still ahead. India itself was passing through a difficult period, both economically and politically. It was their common concern for the country, and their convergent ideas on how India could best address the daunting challenges it was then facing, that brought them closer. One was an entrepreneur, who believed in India's vast potential to achieve prosperity through innovation-driven enterprise and in sharing the prosperity with the masses. The other was a man of ideas, one who had moved away from the foreign ideology of state control of the economy and society and was seeking an Indian model of economic growth and social development. The two had regular, long and intense discussions on what was holding India back, what was preventing the full flowering of our national personality, and how to change entrenched mindsets in society and polity. Out of this convergence of vision and passion began their friendship, which eventually evolved into a lifelong partnership.

As a young man trying to find answers to several questions about my country and the world, I was often a keen witness to—and an occasional participant in—their discussions, which took place either in my father's office at Maker Chambers IV or in the drawing rooms of our house. I learnt a great deal from Mishra Uncle from those days onwards. He came across as an erudite person, who could be relied upon to give frank, disinterested but useful counsel. Despite his seniority in age and

knowledge, he always listened to my youthful and sometimes contrarian views. As years passed, my personal bond with Mishra Uncle, independent of Papa's, became stronger. He became my sounding board whenever I was faced with a dilemma, and an elderly, trustworthy hand to guide me in my difficult moments. Just as he had helped my father, he helped me shape my thinking about building Reliance—the new responsibility that was placed on my young shoulders. The word 'Rishi' in Sanskrit means an exceptionally learned and wise man. Mishra Uncle lived up to this meaning of his first name. However, it was much later that I came to know that he was an ardent student of Vedic science, and devoted a significant amount of his time and energy in disseminating what he had learned. I realized this only after my father passed away in 2002, when Mishra Uncle came to occupy an even more important place in my life. By then, two of his scholarly books on the subject—*Before the Beginning and After the End: In light of the Vedas,* and *The Cosmic Matrix in the Light of the Vedas* had been published. Two more followed: *The Realm of Supraphysics: Mind, Energy and Matter in the Light of the Vedas and The Ultimate Dialogue: Fusion of Knowledge, Intelligence and Action*.

What I have so far described is Mishra Uncle's influence on me in my personal and family sphere. But my admiration and respect for him also rests on his work in the public sphere. He was not merely a thinker, but a man of action. He was passionate about building institutions that would outlast him. An abiding tribute to this passion is the Observer Research Foundation, which he established. He convinced my father that India, with all its potential to become a global player, did not possess a single world-class public policy think tank capable of providing high-quality, well-researched inputs to government and catalyzing well-informed societal debate on major issues confronting the nation and the world. He argued that a Rising India's confident voice needed to be heard in international fora from an independent research body. Similarly, such a research body in India needed to establish strong global partnerships without governmental support. My father readily agreed to back the initiative. Their partnership thus gave birth to the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), which, I am proud to say, has now grown into India's leading non-governmental and non-partisan think tank.

Institutions are known and sustained by the commitment, competence and practical contribution of the people working in and for it. And this is where Mishra Uncle demonstrated his exceptional leadership qualities. He was able to attract some of the best minds from diverse spheres in India's public life. With their active cooperation, he built ORF as an institution that soon began to command respect in government circles, political establishment, diplomatic fraternity, academic portals and the intelligentsia. Uncle's success lay in his remarkable ability to forge and sustain close personal relationships with people from divergent political and ideological backgrounds. No wonder that he could create and manage

efficient channels of communication not only with successive prime ministers, but leaders of practically all the political parties. It is this same rare quality that made him a successful negotiator in Track II diplomacy in India.

The void caused in my life by Uncle's passing will remain forever. The fond memories of the time we spent together bring a lump into my throat and a surge of emotions to my mind— a feeling of irreplaceable loss, a sense of gratitude for all the wise advice I received from him, his gentle smile etched deep in my mind, and much more. I can only say to Renuka Aunty that I miss him as much as she and their children do.

I am, however, confident that the good work he did in his life will continue to guide the Observer Research Foundation as it embarks on a new phase of its journey along a wider vista towards more ambitious destinations.

Today I recall my own words at the memorial meeting held in his honour in New Delhi on 24 January 2009:

"His insights have influenced my outlook. The concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or the World as One Family I realised in the mid-80s even before globalization became a buzzword. The philosophy of Kautilya that wealth creators have to emulate the Sun drawing water from rivers and oceans and returning the water to the earth as rain and bring prosperity to one and all on our planet was something that I have really imbibed from him. Today, he is one with Water, the Sun and the Earth, leaving his legacy behind and letting us take leaves from his life to learn to live with and to draw inspiration from. I pray to the almighty to give peace and tranquility to his soul and fortitude to all of us in overcoming his demise."

PAPA

Sanjeev Mishra

Respected Papa,
Charansparsh,

Although you didn't forward your email address to me when you left us this last time, I know for sure that you will get my message. I remember in New York, just before your major operation, you explained that all beings are connected in this universe in some shape or form; it doesn't matter what form one is in, one can receive and send vibes (energy). So I know you can read my letter.

From my childhood, you have been my hero in all respects. But what I wanted most of all was to beat you in playing cards. I tried many times, even last September, but couldn't. Never mind: as you said, don't give up, there will be a next time.

A couple of years back I was very confused and was finding it difficult to make a decision about life. I was trying to choose between starting a business, which would ensure a better financial future, or to devoting time to my family. You told me to make my priorities clear, whether I wanted the next few years to be happy, stable and peaceful or challenging and risky. At the same time you made it clear that quality time with one's partner and children will only happen within a limited time, whereas financial opportunities will come again in different forms. Your advice helped to make my priorities clear and I could make my decision without any confusion.

On 9 January 2009 you decided to leave your body and merge with the supreme light. I felt very sad but couldn't cry. I felt sad because I would no longer be able to share and communicate with you face to face, to sit on your bed and give your feet a massage when you need it (or when I wish to enjoy that pleasure). The last three and half years have been the most valuable years in my life. Not only did I have the chance to share time with you and Aie, but I had the chance to sit at your feet and learn about life. I know that the times were difficult and challenging, but you made it so easy for us. We were supposed to support and hold you together, but it was the other way around. It was your strength and courage that kept us together all this time. You were more concerned about the people you loved most (who you would be leaving behind). Even during the most difficult time, you wanted to enjoy and live your life without worrying about what would happen to you in the future. I will never forget that you wanted to go out and have nice meals before your operation in New York, because you knew that after they removed your

stomach you wouldn't be able to enjoy those meals.

After we were together in New York, you came back to India. When I called you from Australia and asked if you wanted me to come to India, you said yes - not because you needed support, but because you could see that Aie was feeling low and that for her sake we should be there. All that time, when you yourself were going through so much pain and discomfort (physically), I admired your strong will, which gave you the strength to deal with the situation. Every doctor was surprised that you accepted pain relievers only once in all this time. I remember one doctor saying that there had to be some outside force (energy) which was keeping you going. I wanted to say, no, it is not outside but it is his own inner power which keeps him going. You always said that you didn't want to stay in bed and wait for something to happen.

On 9 January 2009, when we were all sitting in the ICU and the doctor was talking to us about how and when to make the big decision about the continuance of your treatment, we were in so much pain. How could we decide when enough was enough? How could we know what you would want? And, worst of all, how would we prepare ourselves to say goodbye? But, just as you always helped us to make the right decision, you decided this time too. You decided to stop your heart from beating before we had to make that decision. I have no doubt that this is what happened. You could feel the pain and agony Aie was going through, and you could feel how it would hurt Vyv and me and all of us who were there that day. So you made the decision that it was time to move on. This shows how much you love and care about all of us.

I know that you are not with me in one way, but deep down in my heart I know that you are around me, looking at me and ready to hold my hand and guide me whenever I need it. I couldn't ask for anything more than the time we spent together. I will always treasure it.

PAPA I LOVE YOU AND WILL MISS YOU.
BABLO
08 February 2009

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

DADA JI

Tanvi Mishra

What day is it? And what month? This clock never seemed so alive...

If you only had that one day to live, what would you do? What would you say? If you knew someone who had only a day to live, what would you tell the person? How many years have you been holding anything back? Would you apologize? Would you confess? What secrets would come out in the next 24 hours? Could you. would you save a life, if they had only a day to live?

I would...if only I could....

Sometimes I wonder how can one cry for a man who lived a long, full life? That is just it: you can't. Not for a man who loved playing games with his grandchildren, who had a lovely wife, who loved 'Rasam', who travelled around the world for the most important meetings, and lost his life fighting cancer. Not for a man whose death meant the end of his pain and the beginning of his journey to infinity and beyond.

My little letter to him ...

Dadaji, the day you died, my world came crashing down. Imagine, what it must have been like for me. I felt betrayed, I felt like you just left. Did I even get to say goodbye? Or I love you?

Sometimes I get the impression the soul is a parade of life against my will. I hated the news of you going away, but then I thought, "Maybe it doesn't hurt anymore". It is so easy for me now, as I sit here comfortably typing away at my computer, to spout the things that have always been on my mind, as if I had been saying them all the time .. Why didn't I? I had so much to tell you! So much to learn from you! So many things I feel are eating me inside now. I find myself talking to you everyday and think after a while. "Are you listening?" I will wait for tomorrow when you answer me.

I don't ever remember saying those words to you. I love you. I always just assumed you knew I loved you. Unconditionally.

To this day, you are the man I aspire to be like. You were a hard worker, a very important man. Always in your office, writing your books. I admire you more and more, everyday. I remember everything about you. Every time I go out for South Indian food, I make sure I have *'Rasam'* because you liked it so much! Every time I hear someone talking about

the beginning and end of the world, I smile and tell them, 'My Dada ji wrote *Before the Beginning and After the End!'* Every time I see kids with their grandfathers, I miss you. After I wake up every day, before I sleep every night, and all that I do in between, I remember you. Always feel a stab of guilt.

Why guilt? Because when you left, I felt betrayed by you. That was dishonoring your name. I should have known you better. No. I did know you better. You never left without a good reason, and I always understood. I am sorry.

For all those times, I should have said it, I say it now and so it will stay for as long as I am still breathing and forever more. Dadaji, I love you. You are my hero.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

ON MISHRAJI

Anand Bordia

It is not very easy to write about Mishraji, much less about his contribution to society and the country. The more I think of him after he is gone, the more I feel that Mishraji lived at two levels. One was the upper or outer self, where he dealt with the world he lived in, open in different degrees to his large circle of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Pulsating below it was his deep inner self, from whence flowed the spring of his unending search for a true understanding of Vedic wisdom. All through his adult life, even while he was he was busy with his profession as a journalist, or while setting up the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), initiating the Track 2 diplomacy, or even counseling Dhirubhai and then Mukesh Ambani on a vision for Reliance, his other inner self was, perhaps, in constant contemplation seeking the original message contained in the vast Vedic scriptures. Till the last nine years of his life, during which a series of his monumental works on the Vedas were published one after the other, there was very little indication of the mind-boggling amount of work that he must have been doing on this gigantic task he had set for himself. Only a few intimate friends were privy to the fact that he was initiated into Vedic studies by his his Guru, Pt. Moti Lal Shastri. Although he remained a journalist during most of his working life, his interest and area of activity went far beyond it. He had a rich and varied experience as a trade unionist and social activist. As a member of the Rajya Sabha, he was deeply involved in a number of social issues, notably in adult education. His advice was sought by senior politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats and specialists on security matters not only in India, but in Pakistan, the USA, Russia and other countries. He utilized his live channels of communication with people dealing with matters of national interest. With people of religion, he explored ways to reduce communal tension, as also certain novel ideas on food security (through the religious tradition of this subcontinent of feeding the hungry and the deprived). It may appear that Mishraji's ideas and actions may not have had a common thread. An example was his role as an informal adviser to a set of social activists on the one hand, and his close proximity to the captains of India's largest business house, on the other. Or, his back channel diplomacy for normalization of relations with Pakistan on the one hand, and his commitment to Vedic knowledge, on the other. However, with a deeper understanding of his life and mission, it would be clear that his thoughts and ideas were focused on one pivotal issue: the need to uncover the potentials of an emerging India. There was consistency in his view that, for the resurgence of India, it was necessary to recognize the achievements of her past, as also to resolve her present problems and to understand the issues that needed to be addressed for her future. The full dimension of Mishraji's interactions with India's senior leaders, including

successive Prime Ministers, and his efforts towards normalizing the country's relations with Pakistan or resolving the Kashmir issue, may never be fully known. That he accorded great importance to these issues is evident from the initiatives he took in their regard. He felt that the Kashmir issue and the strained relationship with Pakistan had distracted India and prevented her, to a great extent, from reaching the rank of a super power.in the comity of nations. Equally important was his view that unless India's security concerns are addressed, it would be considered a soft State and that Indian foreign policy lacked consistency and comprehensiveness. This, he believed, was largely because the Indian foreign policy formulaters was inadequately informed of the developments in and policies of the different regions of the world. The early '90s saw India facing a severe economic crisis and there was an urgent need to evolve policy alternatives to overcome the situation. The patriot in Mishraji rose to the challenge. He, together with a few eminent economists deliberated on this burning issue. He decided that a platform was necessary to debate such issues of national and international importance. The Observer Research Foundation was thus born. The outcome of the first seminar organized by ORF under Mishraji's chairmanship formed the basis for the economic reforms initiated in that period. The ORF gradually expanded its research activities to other areas, such as national security, international relations, energy security, healthcare, education, science and technology and so on. The organization has now become a reservoir of information and analysis related to policymaking and a favored destination for scholars visiting India from abroad. Throughout his life, Mishraji nurtured a desire to rediscover India's past glory. He believed that the past few centuries, especially the colonial period, witnessed subtle and consistent attempts to distort India's ancient intellectual treasures. Independent India unfortunately failed to recognize and correct the distortions and damage that were perpetrated by British colonial policies. Mishraji had an acute sense of the debt which he owed to his teacher, Pandit Motilal Shastri, which was to write in the English language what he had learnt from Shastriji about interpretating the Vedas. *Before the Beginning and After the End*, Mishraji's first book, was published in 2000. This book attempts to convey the original, complex messages contained in the Vedas, in modern language. It presents a rare opportunity to delve into the fundamental mysteries of the universe. In 2001 his second book, *The Cosmic Matrix: In the Light of the Vedas,* was published. This volume concerns the subtlety, complexity, continuity and fluidity of the cosmos and explores the Vedic view of the process of 'creation' and 'dissolution'. Mishraji's third work, *The Realm of Supraphysics—Mind, Energy and Matter: in the light of the Vedas* was published in 2003. The book analyses the interplay of energy and matter and its intrinsic relationship with mind. Soon after the first volume was published, Mishraji was diagnosed with cancer. However, he had a mission to fulfill and a debt to pay. Even during the debilitating treatment and repeated surgical interventions, his mind was intact and his faith unshaken. Despite his struggle against the brute force of cancer, which

was draining the life out of him, Mishraji would get up at 2 or 3 in the morning and resolutely finish writing or revising his books. Such was his courage and determination even in a situation in which most people would give up and fall into despair. During one of my visits to a well-known but dreary Mumbai Hospital in an atmosphere of overwhelming sadness, Mishraji talked of his next book. He was optimistic. His body was weakened by the deadly cancer and his limbs were weak and listless. However, his face brightened up and eyes sparkled as he talked about the broad contours of his next work. By the time he finished his fourth volume, *The Ultimate Dialogue—Fusion of Knowledge, Intelligence and Action*, it was becoming clear how this disease would end. Yet, in a remarkable defiance of his physical condition, as if under divine inspiration, he resolutely began the fifth volume *The Whole Being: Towards Harmony and Happiness* and had half finished writing the book when the end came. His was indeed the heroism of a crusader.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

MISHRAJI

R.S. Jain

Mishraji, as I used to address him, was many things in one. Though temperamentally a reserved person, his attributes revealed itself gradually as one came closer to him. He was a multi-spectral personality with some rare capabilities.

I met him first around 1974. It took me some time to get infected with the radiance of his intellect and his winning ways—winner that he always was, except in his last battle with cancer, which he fought relentlessly and with a smile. Human effort, howsoever significant, always yields to destiny. Mishraji knew this well.

Besides his contributions in the field of journalism and public life, he made a mark through his learning of the Vedas from his guru and transmitting this knowledge in his scholarly works, i.e., *Before the Beginning and After the End; The Realm of Supraphysics; The Cosmic Matrix: In the Light of the Vedas; The Ultimate Dialogue and The Whole Being*, on which he was working in his last days.

Reading through some of his works, most of which went above my head to begin with, I was struck not only by his profound knowledge of the Vedas, but also by his clarity about the concepts of physics even though he was not a student of science. Elucidating the developments in modern physics, he brought out the limitations of science in our understanding of the universe, and espoused the Vedic perception of the universe as one which transcends physical laws. He concretized the Vedic view of the cosmos as an integrated whole, a unified entity and elaborated upon the interplay of cosmic forces beyond the physical universe that lead to 'creation' and 'dissolution'. The subtle illumination of the Vedic wisdom he made comprehensible by transcending the boundaries of our constrained minds. His works are all the more significant in the contemporary situation when scientists are tending to concede that: "The universe lies beyond the grasp of any intellect, no matter how powerful, that could exist within the universe there are, inevitably, facts about the universe which its inhabitants can not learn by experiment or predict with computation". The Vedas come to our rescue here, which take us to the experience—the *anubhuti* of the Vedic seers, as against the empiricism of modern science. Mishraji unravelled the knowledge contained in the Vedas and transmitted it in the English language, thus making it available to a much wider audience.

He was haunted by his quest for knowledge. He would ask me searching questions, on which I fumbled, about the geological past of the Jaisalmer

region, the marine transgressions and so on; he would debate on subjects ranging from the water scarcity to the unfathomed realms of knowledge like thought energy. This was in addition to his main interest in philosophical concepts and of course, political issues, of which I had no inkling. Seldom will one find a person, busy as he was, who would take so much interest in matters not of direct concern to him.

At personal level, he was warm, hospitable and caring and made one feel wanted. I can never forget how once, when I visited him in Delhi during his busy schedule, someone sitting nearby asked him *Aaj apka kya programme hai?* He replied spontaneously, *Jain sab aye hai, hum to aaj unke sath hai*. This was a time when he was occupied with big-wigs. I was really touched because I considered myself a very humble person compared to them. Such were his winning ways.

All of us who knew him know how much he was loved and how deeply he will be missed. I was struck when I saw some distinguished elderly people crying while paying homage to his earthly remains at his residence. Likewise, there were many with misty eyes at the funeral; an array of people from different political, social and cultural backgrounds, all mourning together. It speaks of the universality of admiration for Mishraji. He will be greatly missed.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

AN OPEN HOUSE

Mukund Padmanabhan

I first met Mishraji as the uncle of the woman I was going to marry. This was in the mid-80s, when her aunt Babli Masi (Renuka) and Mishraji lived in the ground floor of a house in Sarvapriya Vihar. My fiance, Rajul, lived in a modest room in Defence Colony. I suspect it was a combination of her closeness to her aunt and the open house that the Mishras ran that saw her (and as a result me) spending a fair bit of time at Sarvapriya Vihar.

In those days, Rajul was passionately involved in a project in a village called Dayalpur in Haryana. It often meant spending the whole day in the village, after which she would return hot and dusty to Sarvapriya Vihar, for tea, a wash, and also to put her feet up. I soon became familiar with the routine—if she wasn't in her humble Defence Colony digs, then the chances were that she was chilling out in the relatively luxurious environs at Sarvapriya Vihar.

In time, I began to understand that the open house that Mishraji ran was more than a facility extended to a niece. It was also a window to understanding who he was. It is in the nature of most of us to draw lines between the public and the private, between a job and home, between colleagues and friends, between work and relaxation. One of the unique things about Mishraji was the capacity to dissolve these lines. His life was not slotted in to compartments but was a seamless whole. This is why such a motley lot of people—writers, politicians, intellectuals, activists—was drawn to his house in the evenings. This is why he could engage all sorts of people in his work interests, his plans, his ideas. This is why he could negotiate the worlds of the professional and personal with a natural ease. I recall that in the middle of two dinners at our apartment in Chennai, he excused himself—not entirely to the approval of his wife, I think—to call on the late Tamil Manilaa Congress chief G.K. Moopanar, who lived nearby. He was back within the hour as he promised and slipped effortlessly back into the evening.

Anybody who called on him during his illness over the last couple of years would have been struck by the fact that he never let up. He was plugged into the world and into his core interests until the very end. This, as anyone who knew him well would vouch for, included food. There were evenings after dinner, when we would drive kilometres in Delhi for a purpose that any South Indian like myself will never fully understand or appreciate—the search for the perfect paan.

Attending a condolence meeting at the Observer Research Foundation's

office in Chennai a few days after he passed away, I listened to a number of speakers talk about him. Their tributes reinforced the truth that Mishraji's life was not partitioned in the way that most of ours are. Their engagement with him was professional, while mine was entirely personal. But it was revealing how much of the former—in one way or the other—was exposed to me over the last two decades.

I recall meeting Aruna Asaf Ali at dinners at his house, particularly one during which there was an animated discussion on what the Congress had become and who it represented. I remember having a cup of tea with him one afternoon, when he excused himself to take a call. He returned to say, "That was Dhirubhai." His formal association with the Ambanis and the Observer Research Foundation would develop only much later.

One afternoon some 25 years or so ago, when no one else was at his house, he suggested we watch a re-run of his lengthy interview with Mrs. Indira Gandhi on Doordarshan. If memory serves me right, it was one part of a series that the channel was re-telecasting. After it was through, I asked—with the impetuousness and impatience of a young man with journalistic ambitions—why it hadn't been tougher and more combative. (In my eyes then, Mrs. Gandhi had irreparably blotted her book with the Emergency.) He replied with words to the effect that he saw it as a work of record, a key to understanding her thoughts on various issues—a kind of visual political biography if you like. This helped me see it in a different light.

The last dinner I remember having at his Delhi residence, which by then had shifted to Vasant Vihar, was attended by three of four others and almost wholly devoted to talk about the viability of starting a news channel. The ambition and scale of the project or idea was not entirely clear to me until I attended the condolence meeting, where one speaker said Mr Mishra's vision was that of a global channel working out of India, one that reached out to the sub-continent and beyond—a kind of Indian Al Jazeera, if you like.

Others can record his contributions to journalism, to politics, and to public life better than I can. As a relative, I can only pay tribute to his spirit of generosity and his willingness to share his house, his friends, his interests and his life with Rajul and myself.

When we got married, he was very keen on throwing a reception for us in Delhi. As someone who did not want any fanfare, and who insisted on and succeeded in having a small and informal wedding, the idea did not find much favour with me. Looking back, with the hindsight of maturity, the gracious thing to do would have been to accept his generous gesture. It would have provided one more strand in the thread of Rajul's and my relationship with this very remarkable man.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

HAPPINESS!

Bharat Goenka

The strangest of all acts I have done is what I am doing now. Writing about someone who comprehensively demonstrated to me that I have aeons to go before being able to write well. Writing about someone who could instantly pick out the non-coherent pieces of my writing. Writing without being able to see the glint of appreciation in his eyes nor the absence of expression when it is unappreciated.

Yet, that is the most minor loss one feels.

Soon after he left us, I had described my relationship with Mishra Uncle as a 'love affair with a 70-year old man'. Much later, I felt the frustration of inadequate expression.

He had touched me in so many ways and become so completely a part of my 'regular thought', that it was difficult to call it anything but a love affair, however inadequate that phrase was.

Let me give just one example of the impact that this relationship has had on me. As with most people, I too go through life's ups and downs. And so do people who are dear to me. When I reflect on the 'way I live' today and the 'way I used to live', I find myself a happier person. Paradoxically, there is no material change in the ups and downs. In fact, if anything, some of the downs are deeper and longer. Yet, I am a happier person.

I attribute this unconditionally to Mishra Uncle. I had the privilege of being close to him through my downs, his downs, and the downs of people mutually close to us. It was remarkable to see a person actually 'live' the philosophy that he expounded - being involved yet detached. Being attached, yet detached. Of getting completely embroiled in a situation and yet remaining unaffected by it.

Suddenly the dialogues we used to have on ancient philosophy and wisdom changed colour. I was no longer conversing with a person who was knowledgeable about this; I was conversing with a person who was its embodiment. It was impossible not to be affected. When a preacher preaches, we may tend to ignore it. When a practitioner teaches, it is difficult to ignore it.

The increasing understanding of life and existence under his guidance led to the present state of mind - of being a happier person. His teaching had been that happiness means 'expansion' and - truly - one felt increasingly 'expanded' after every meeting with him.

The most enduring and—I believe—the most durable of my memories will definitely be of this approach to life. All his writings, all his actions, all his statements were always consistent with this one aspect, irrespective of what the circumstances were.

This gift of happiness is truly the greatest any one can receive in a love affair. I hope, someday, someone will be able to call me a worthy student of his, and I am able to pass this gift on.

The heavens are blessed to have him.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

IN FOND MEMORY OF A *RISHI*

C.M. Jayan

The twenty-first century was only eight years old when intellectual India was bereaved by the loss of not merely a renowned intellectual, but also of a true patriot. January 9, 2009 was the saddest day in the history of the Observer Research Foundation, a leading independent public policy think-tank of India. On this day, Rishi Kumar Mishra, its founder-Chairman, breathed his last. It was not only the ORF, the institution he founded and nurtured with the utmost care that felt orphaned by his passing away; all those in India and across the world with whom he had an association, however brief it may have been, felt the pain because he had touched each of their lives personally.

To say that Mishraji was a multifaceted personality would be an understatement. He was, in a very real and practical sense, a living institution. People knew him as an outstanding journalist, an eminent Parliamentarian and as someone deeply concerned about the problems and issues facing India. Many gave him credit for influencing policies of the government, solving disputes between political parties and even between nations! To try to capture him in a single frame would, therefore, not be a worthwhile endeavour.

A small story about Maharishi Bharadwaj[1] may help illuminate a little known aspect of Mishraji's life:

Maharishi Bhardwaj observed severe penance to please Lord Brahma. Pleased by the rishi's devotion, the Lord granted him a boon of his choice. The rishi requested him to grant him another birth. When Brahma asked him why would he like to have one more life, the rishi replied:

"Oh! My Lord, in this life, I have been able to study this universe to a great extent, but the study is not yet complete. I believe if you endow me with a second life, my knowledge would be complete."

The Lord asked the Maharishi to turn around and look at what was before him. Surprised, the rishi did as asked and replied, "I see nothing but a range of mountains!" The Lord asked the rishi to go to the mountains and bring three handfuls of soil. When he returned, the Lord said, "What you have learnt so far is equivalent to the soil you have brought from the mountains. What remains to be learnt is equivalent to the mountains themselves. Now, tell me how many births do you need?"

Humbled, the Maharishi replied, "My Lord, I understand your message. I do not need any more births and am happy with the present one. I leave

the mantle of carrying forward my study to future generations".

Such is the complexity of our universe, and the knowledge thereof.

R.K. Mishra belonged to the dwindling group of exponents promoting ancient Indian schools of thought. He channeled a significant part of his energy in this direction, so that the treasures of profound knowledge hidden in the Vedic texts became known to the modern world.

During the last couple of years of his life, when he had to spend most of his time in Mumbai, far from his Delhi home, he would ask me to visit him for several days at a stretch and assist him in his work. Not because it was impossible to find someone in Mumbai, but because of his affection for me and confidence in my work. In the initial days, my stay in Mumbai would be for a day or two, but on later occasions these visits would stretch to almost 15 days. My own family was in Delhi and I missed them; I used every opportunity as an excuse to hurry back. But Mishraji was as shrewd as he was affectionate. On one such occasion, when I told him that I needed to go back because I did not carry enough clothes, which obviously was an excuse, his instant reply was, "In Mumbai also people wear clothes, so we can get clothes for you here". Of course, there was a nice smile on his face.

Once, when he was very ill, I chose not to tell him about an urgent need to go home. When he came to know about it, he not only admonished me, but got me onto the next flight to Delhi, saying, "You should have told me of your situation, we can always make adjustments". This is only one of the many examples of his kind heartedness.

His ability to arrive at decisions concerning diverse complex issues was remarkable. Anyone in the ORF, irrespective of hierarchy, could knock at his door and seek his advice on a seemingly insoluble problem and Mishraji would not only give him/her a patient hearing but an instant solution as well. During project review meetings with his colleagues at the ORF, he normally did not encourage discussion about the several aspects on which the manager or faculty member had done thorough homework. Instead, with remarkable acuity, he would spot the one element that appeared shaky and give his invaluable suggestions on how to deal with it.

I started working with Mishraji sometime in 1994. I vividly remember his struggle to learn the pre-Windows computer applications such as dBase, Word Star and so on. His pursuit was so dedicated that in a few years he could discuss complicated IT issues with the head of the department and even suggest ways forward. This was the spirit he displayed when many of his age, some much younger, hadn't even learned to open their own emails! He began receiving lessons in classical music at the age of 75, even as he fought his deadly illness, underscoring his belief that learning is a continuous, never ending process as long as we keep our minds wide

open.

As a writer, Mishraji was never satisfied with his own work. Everything he wrote would be revised several times—be it a chapter for his book, a letter to his son, or even an internal communication to his colleagues. It is not that the first and the subsequent versions were incorrect, but because he believed that there is nothing called perfection in writing, that there is always scope for further improvement. Finally, when I looked tired of re-doing the draft so many times, he would say, "Now this is final, you don't show it to me. Just send it".

A native of Kerala, I moved to Delhi when I was only eighteen. I spent more time with Mishraji than with my real parents. Over the years he had become like a father and a teacher to me. I had the fortune of working closely with him for more than fifteen years; assisting him in my humble way, continuously learning from him and, like any father, he occasionally gave a scolding. The several lessons of life that I learned at his feet will be dear to me forever. I have no hesitation in admitting that even these humble words which I have written are his legacy. I feel privileged that he mentioned my name in the acknowledgements of three of his books, revered for their content and depth of insight.

[1] *Quoted from a Lecture by Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Honorary Director, Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage, Thiruvananthapuram.*

A FINE HUMAN BEING

R.K. Mehra

It is a matter of great privilege, but with a heavy heart, that I offer my condolence to the family of the Observer Research Foundation Founder Chairman, Shri R.K. Mishra. No words are enough to describe as dynamic and dignified a personality as the late shri Mishra. His many contributions in the diverse roles of a journalist, editor, author, visionary thinker and parliamentarian, reflect his multifaceted yet humble personality. Above all, he was a fine human being. My long association with Mishraji goes back to my early days in Calcutta, and it continued in Delhi. I had the privilege of knowing him in various capacities. I still remember the day when he called me and spoke to me about publishing his book Before the Beginning and After the End. His flair for writing and interest in ancient Indian philosophy, Vedas and Upanishads remains unmatched in his much acclaimed books - *The Ultimate Dialogue* and *The Cosmic Matrix*. When Shri Hamid Ansari was appointed Vice President of India, Mishraji preferred to introduce him first and foremost as a Rupa author and then as the Vice President of India. This is yet another instance which reveals his zeal and immense respect for creative and original writing. He was a member of the National Integration Council of the Government of India and with his expertise in national and international affairs played a key role in back-channel diplomacy for resolving sensitive and contentious issues. His central role as an intermediary in Track II diplomacy came to light when he was sent on a mission to meet key players in Pakistan politics to find ways to resolve the crisis of 1999. Though he was a man of power, the fact that he always underplayed his position speaks volumes about the modest and simple aspect of his personality. Mishraji was passionate about ORF and devoted all his enthusiasm and creativity in making the policy think tank a success. Under his leadership, ORF has emerged as a powerful platform for research and dialogue on critical foreign policy issues. Incidentally, many of the ORF titles have been published by Rupa & Co. Working with him and understanding from such close quarters his vision of India was a great learning experience. One afternoon he called me up to say that he was going to Us for some time. When we met, he spoke to me about his terminal illness without a wrinkle on his face, reflective of his undying spirit of accepting the inevitable. Although Mishraji is no more with us, the legacy of ORF that he kindled with Rupa & Co. will continue for all time to come. Our continued collaboration with ORF, I believe, would be a fitting tribute to him.

A REMARKABLE PERSON

Lalit Bhasin

R K Mishra was a colossus, a rare personality where brilliance and genius were single-mindedly channelized into activities for the good of the country and the uplift of the masses. Having known him for the last twenty years or so—post *Patriot/Link* to *Observer* (newspaper) and then the ORF—we established a close rapport and an all pervasive understanding.

Mishraji was privy to many consultations, about which he was naturally reticent, but he would always share with me those sensitive issues where he thought I could give useful inputs. He had immense faith in me with regard to legal matters and would invariably abide by my opinions and advise. Once, in order to secure financial assistance for the company owning *Patriot/Link*, he had given personal guarantees that banks and financial institutions revoked, as the company defaulted in repayment. Without demur, he faced the litigation and eventually, we succeeded in overcoming the legal problems.

Public personalities invariably elicit contradictory impulses. Yet, Mishraji never wavered from his abiding values and commitments.

He had a very kind heart. Despite some advice to the contrary, he was emphatic in his instructions to the ORF management that the entire staff of the institution must receive all legal entitlements and dues without any attempt to circumvent the law. He was also a deeply religious man with impeccable secular credentials, something many find difficult to comprehend. He was deeply disturbed because of harassment caused to the Shankaracharya of Kancheepuram when cases were filed against His Holiness. Fortunately, and much to his relief, the evil days soon passed.

I never saw him get angry or annoyed, though he often got upset with declining standards in public life. He always had an amiable smile—a quality which he shared with his gracious wife Renukaji. Undoubtedly, Mishraji's most outstanding achievement was in conceiving, conceptualizing and creating the Observer Research Foundation.

Today this unique institution is acknowledged as a great think-tank on the lines of the Brookings Institution, USA and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin.

Mishraji will continue to live because of his everlasting contribution in leaving behind ORF as an institute of excellence. But above all, those of us who knew him personally, will also see him in the gentle and sober

face of Renukaji.

HE WILL ALWAYS REMAIN WITH US

Ursula & Wolfgang Grabowski

Over the years we have met a lot of people, having for a long time represented our country, the erstwhile German Democratic Republic (GDR). But only a few of them will remain in our minds and hearts. RK and Renuka Mishra are two such persons.

We did not have much time for preparing for our work and life in India. The decision to leave Syria for India was sudden and, in order to learn about this great country in a very short time, we had to concentrate on talking to people who had lived and worked in India. Their recommendation was, in Delhi, meet R.K. Mishra from the *Patriot* as soon as possible and you will find not only your answers but a friend. That is what we did and our stay in India became for us a wonderful experience, to a great extent with the help of R.K. and Renuka Mishra.

We met very often, had long and very interesting debates on India, the Soviet Union, China, the USA and West Europe and certainly about the GDR and the relationship between the two German states. We also liked to speak about our families, in particular about our children who had to stay behind in the GDR.

We soon began to admire the Indian couple, their relationships, their very democratic way of behaviour and approach, their dignity. No attempt at showing off. Very unlike what so many people with similar knowledge and social status elsewhere are unable to avoid.

They helped us acquire a deeper understanding of a great and rising country, a glimpse of India's amazing history alongside the many social contradictions and problems. R.K. Mishra gave us great honour by presenting us with his profound scientific work on the ancient Indian Vedic philosophy. We also got a feeling for the grassroots social work that Renuka Mishra was involved in.

The Mishras were very interested in the German Democratic Republic. RK was eager to find out details of her roots and history, but also her problems. In their library I found books by Rosa Luxemburg, the famous fighter for freedom against imperialistic war.

Once, in a discussion I tried to summarize how I felt about what many Indian people I had met were thinking about our country:

The GDR is a friendly country. Our relations are free of problems. The political, economic and cultural partnership has developed to the mutual

benefit of both countries. There is shared understanding about colonialism, the western drive for hegemony, the role of imperialism. Nehru and other Indian freedom fighters have, over the years, enjoyed close interaction with left wing people in Germany (Toller, Tucholsky, Munzberg). They first met them in Germany in the 1920s and over time, have influenced each other.

Most people in the GDR are aware and deeply appreciative of the fight of the Indian people for freedom and against colonialism.

Both anti-fascism and peace are deeply rooted within the people. In contrast to many western countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), in the GDR you won't find discrimination against people from other countries and colour (even very rich Indians shared this opinion). There is no unemployment in the GDR, the social standards are high, higher than in the other socialist countries.

The achievements in culture, education and sport are outstanding.

RK more or less agreed with such an assessment. But I felt that he had at that time already evolved a rather clear understanding of the problems and deficits of our country. He was acutely aware of our lack of democracy, which was reducing our capacity for constant renewal in content and in leading personnel.

But as always, he handled such issues very delicately, somewhat like Willy Brandt, who was convinced in a talk with me in Delhi in May 1990 that the reunification of the two Germanys would take place democratically and give full consideration to the achievements of the GDR and the skill and knowledge of her people. Just note the difference with western mainstream thinking (which is dominant even now, twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the GDR), which condemns everything and everybody linked with the GDR.

I think that unlike me, R.K. Mishra felt much less euphoric about Gorbachev's perestroika attempt. More like Adi Godrej from Bombay, who in December 1988, asked me if Gorbachev was aware of what he was doing and if he was mature enough to tackle the crisis of the Soviet system. Or as Rajiv Gandhi, who in my last talk with him in May 1990 expressed deep doubt about Gorbachev's way to reform the Soviet Union, and was full of regret about a world that was about to pass into history.

But none of us, having lived and acted at that time in Delhi, could have imagined the forthcoming crucial consequences (which in our days have brought us to many wars, a destabilized world, a never seen before financial and systemic crisis all over the world).

Some time after the change, Renuka and R.K. Mishra came to the united

Germany. We were happy to host them and their friends, Prodosh and Gisela Aich from Oldenburg, in our flat in Berlin for one week. Their solidarity was heart warming. I think that all four had a deep feeling about our losing the country which had brought us up and which we had tried to serve honestly. And all of us felt sad that this historic attempt to develop an alternative Germany failed and that we were not mature enough to create, after the second World War and fascism, a new world. We had long discussions about the reasons. I remember that RK was especially interested in the fate of the divided countries.

We continued our discussions in Delhi. I had come to attend the party congresses of the CPI(M) in Hyderabad and of the CPI in Trivandrum at the end of March 2002 as guest from the Party of Democratic Socialism(PDS). On the way back to Berlin, I stopped over in Delhi and was happy to meet the Mishras in their house.

At that time, I had joined the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, a political foundation linked to the Die Linke/PDS. In Germany all parties elected to the Bundestag have political foundations that are financed from the budget in accordance with the percentage of their voters for voluntary expert work on global international developments. Given my special interest in Russia, India, China and the *Shanghai Organisation for Cooperation*, I was pleasantly surprised to learn from RK that he, together with friends and associates, had created the Observer Research Foundation and that they were engaged in similar projects as the RLS. I promised to talk to the Board of the RLS about the ORF and suggest cooperation between the two foundations.

In August 2002 Renuka and RK once again visited Berlin, and signed an agreement for cooperation between ORF and RLS. Since then, we have continued a fruitful exchange— conferences, expert delegations, publications, brain storming— on vital international questions.

R.K. Mishra always will remain an architect of that interesting and important project of German and Indian intellectuals which had its roots in the phase when Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore met their friends in Germany and the German anti-fascist and the first ambassador of the GDR to India, Herbert Fischer, who had fought on the side of Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle of the Indian people against colonialism, for a free and independent India.

It is difficult to believe that R.K. Mishra is no more alive, that he will no more meet us with his charming and friendly smile. He always will be with us, remembered for his outstanding knowledge, his eagerness to find out and learn, to discuss frankly and with great tolerance, his humanism and a fine sense of humour.

REMEMBERING RK IN MANY DIMENSIONS

Akhila & Avik Ghosh

Few people in India, even among the religious, associated the Vedas with anything but religion. RK Mishra was one of the few who had knowledge of the sciences that were expounded in the Vedas, pursuing the logic that understanding of the laws and secrets of the Universe was only a sequel to understanding the Cause of its manifestation which was what 'religious' knowledge was about.

RK wrote four books on this subject of Vedic Sciences. He was also connected with various people interested in the field and were into research for the resurgence of lost and misunderstood materials of the hoary past. Shri Jayendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi, is one such person. RK also had two trusts engaged in the promotion and spread of some aspects of our culture and knowledge systems.

No mention of people like RK is complete without a mention of their Guru, because the identity of the disciple, the purpose of life and its work, and even the time of death, is drawn and governed by the Guru-shishya connectivity. Through all of RK's secular activities, ranging across journalism, politics, business relations and research, this connectivity with religious thought must have flowed quietly like the Ganga as a life-supporting undercurrent.

We have known RK in various ways and through various associations, with ORF, with Hindustani classical music or in promotion of Indian culture. I (Avik) first met him in the late 70s when I was working in CENDIT where we used audio-visual media (including video technology in its early days) for rural development. RK came with Renuka to view a video documenting the transformational process of the firebrand trade-union leader, George Fernandes, who had just become a Cabinet minister in the Janata government. This was, however, a casual encounter. Later in 1979, we were working with Renuka (and Primila Lewis) in documenting, on video, the struggle of the farm workers, brick-kiln and stone quarry workers in Mehrauli. A Mazdoor-Kisan mela had been organized as an occasion to create awareness and consolidate the workers' struggle for better wages and working conditions and the video documents were being screened there. RK was an enthusiastic supporter of the work being done by Renuka, Primila and the group. I remember him bringing Mrs Aruna Asaf Ali to the mela and showing her around.

It was much later in the mid-80s that I got to know him. It was again regarding a video production which had run into trouble. It concerned the documentation of the genocide and its aftermath in Cambodia (then

Kampuchea). RK was not happy with the commentary and requested me to 'salvage' it as he needed to screen it to a distinguished gathering of diplomats, politicians and other policy-makers. Though time was very short, somehow it was managed successfully. This was when I discovered his trusting and friendly nature and the enlightened way in which he cooperated and engaged in work and how open and flexible he was to new ideas. It also exposed me to his larger vision of India's engagement with the world. And developed a lasting relationship of admiration and trust and this found expression in his last years when I was with him in the ORF.

He had a great eagerness to learn. In the early '90s when the Internet and the Worldwide Web was restricted mainly to academic and research institutions, he came to our house to learn about the scope and technology and possibilities from our young son of 19 years! But then, even before that, he would come to the house to learn the fundamentals of Hindustani classical music from Akhila. First steps learnt with an open and unassuming attitude of mind.

Much later, in 2003 when I had taken voluntary retirement, he asked me whether I would help out at ORF with the communication activities, specifically to develop and present a communication strategy for ORF as also urgently produce an audio-visual presentation on ORF to be taken abroad during his next visit. In this way, my involvement in ORF led, especially when he fell ill, to an overall consultancy and trouble-shooting role.

However, in the last two years of his life, the association took a different turn.

We had shifted to Rishikesh. RK was due to visit there and stay for a few days. But this did not happen. He was called away to the US for medical purposes and then to Bombay. However, finally he came here. There was a break in treatment and he had been advised to try adjuvant therapy. RK was very keen to try our Ayurveda in Haridwar, though we cautioned him about the lateness of the treatment and the distances involved. But we felt that life had some other design behind this. So, finally RK did come to Haridwar and Rishikesh and we were so happy to see his thrill, satisfaction and peace in this visit, to be near the Ganga and in an environment dear to him. He said that he was quite happy—we discussed the possibility that life could not be prolonged much—and he said that he had finished all his work and was satisfied. There was only this last book.

He also told us the way his Guru breathed his last. RK had gone to be with him. There was no illness or anything. His Guru was instructing him

about the knowledge of Vedic Sciences that he had imparted to RK and was enjoining him to write about this knowledge in English and to publish it. RK joked and said, sure, if he (his Guru) would arrange for the money! So it was agreed.

Then, Shastriji got up and spread a sheet on the floor in the *aangan* and said, all right, he was going. RK caught the implication immediately and he started calling the family. Then his Guru passed away. This was the way many people went in the olden days.

So if the Guru went this way, it is more than probable that the *shishya*, Rishi Kumar Mishra, also passed to his next stage in the same state of knowledge and peace.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

HAVING FUN WITH RK

Charles Lewis

By way of an appendix to Primila's recollections and deep appreciation of RK, I fear my impressions and interactions will seem quite trivial, confined as they mostly are to fond memories and enjoyment of some of the lighter sides, as it were, of RK's life.

It was through Primila's involvement in social activist work and close friendship with Renuka that I came to know about and meet RK. Indeed, one of the earliest encounters was when I was posted as manager to the Oxford University Press (OUP) Pakistan Branch in 1978-81, and RK, Editor of Patriot at that time, came to stay with me in Karachi during Narasimha Rao's visit to Pakistan in June 1981. RK survived the efforts to provide vegetarian dishes prepared by Aslam, the Punjabi cook in my 'bachelor' flat in Clifton, and it was a real pleasure to introduce him to friends during his brief stay, which included visits to the Karachi Press Club and the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs for Narasimha Rao's talk on Indo-Pakistan relations, no doubt arranged by Mani Shankar Aiyar, who was the enterprising and hospitable Consul General at the time, I think.

However, it was the RK in off-duty mode I usually encountered thereafter. Thanks to his propensity for outings or occasional breaks from his and Renuka's hectic life, I came to see more of him in a relaxed and jovial mood. Once back in India with the OUP in the early 1980s and later on after my retirement in 1993, opportunities were seized to get away from Delhi whenever possible for a few days.

It might be to Rajasthan, and I recall a memorable Easter weekend trip by car to Shekhavati, staying in the Castle Mandawa Hotel to relish the local cuisine RK was particularly knowledgeable about. After dinner one evening, we adjourned to the roof terrace of the hotel where, inspired by the night sky and some intake of Old Monk rum, we regaled our respected, though unimpressed, wives with *jugalbandhi* attempts, a la Mishra brothers of course, with a late night raga or two.

Further such attempts on other trips were firmly opposed, but Renuka and Primila were prepared to overlook any dietary restrictions when it came to sharing in RK's enjoyment of local fare, particularly dhaba delights. More than once we went for a weekend to Sohna, not so much for the hot springs, or even a boat trip on Damdama Lake, but for RK unerringly to find for breakfast one particular dhaba on the edge of town which served delectable paranthas, followed by hot, hot jalebis dunked in glasses of warmed fresh buffalo milk.

Other getaway expeditions which we made to Gwalior, Shivpuri and Orchha (MP Tourism), Kuchesar and the Ganga (for a dip in RK's case), Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary and Neemrana group resorts like Kesroli Hill Fort, afforded opportunities of course to sample dhaba fare, though sustenance might not always have been the only attraction—as we found at one dhaba on the way to Alwar, where we stopped for a break from the heat and dust and roar of traffic on the main road. RK and I went inside to find a table while Renuka and Primila had a cigarette outside. The room was plastered with Thums Up posters of Bollywood belles, with the likes of Kajol, Aishwarya, Bipasha and Rani on the wall behind RK, caught on camera with a somewhat wry if not amused or bemused expression behind his spectacles.

But, more than the trips we enjoyed with them, we appreciated RK's keen interest in our family doings. He and Renuka accompanied us to Kasauli to visit our son Karoki at his school at Sanawar. He specially arranged the Hindu blessing ceremony at our reception near Delhi to celebrate Karoki's marriage, and the Graha Pravesh ritual to inaugurate our rural retreat near Ghata village in Haryana—like theirs at Begumpur Khatola, until it became enveloped by a local industrial estate, where we sometimes joined them for a quiet Diwali, listening to their Indian classical music collection (without interventions from RK and me, it has to be added).

For so many of us, RK's passing has left a gap in our lives but some special memories too.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

PANDITJI-AN ENDURING ENIGMA

Rajiv Kumar

Pandit Rishi Kumar Mishra, or simply Panditji to some of us was a rare personality. An enigma to most, including me, an inspiration to others, confidante to some of the most powerful persons in the country and, quite unbelievably, even disliked by a few. Only some one who could have successfully internalized each of the myriad complexities of this ancient land India, to which he would often refer, could be so many different persons to so many. In some ways the statement made for my beloved yet bewildering and despairing country that, "whatever one can say of India, its opposite is always true," perhaps applied to him as well! In Panditji's own understanding, it would simply be the case of each one of us embodying the all pervasive duality. The duality of Shakti and Shiva, the energy and the inert, which, according to the Hindu tradition he had mastered at the feet of his Guru in Rajasthan at a young age, are the very essence and basis of all existence. This amazing ability to grasp the essential duality, to be able to look at diametrically opposite sides of an argument or a situation and even to internalize it within himself was his essential USP. How else could one explain his being friends with and close to both the biggest capitalists and the communists at the same time, with both seeing him as someone who understood and appreciated the finest nuances of their own activity?

This duality, seen in its superficial form, appears as an apparent contradiction in almost all aspects of his life. But once you understood how it worked and allowed him to pursue his objective from any directions he chose, it in turn fascinated, frustrated and fulfilled some of us like me who were fortunate to know him both professionally and as a friend. Nevertheless, I often doubt if there is any one around, including I dare say even Renuka, his closest companion and friend ever since I came to know them, who can, with full confidence, say that they knew him completely. There was always another layer to be discovered or another facet of which one had got only a faint glimpse. This naturally invited more curiosity, which made him attractive and ensured that he would always have a fan following. But this element of uncertainty restrained many people from conferring to him their free, spontaneous loyalty. The knowledge that there was always some more to be known could easily invite skepticism about his genuineness, simply because the fans could never quite know from which standpoint, or which point of reference Panditji was choosing to interact with them. The two real and longest abiding of Panditji's fans are both women. To them, I suspect he may have revealed a deeper and more relaxed view of his various 'selves'. Finally, I am aware that, in his last days, he had said to one of them that she perhaps did not know him completely!

The most intriguing aspect for me was his ability to—at the same time, in the same moment—be firmly rooted in the physical, messy reality of this mortal life and yet transcend it in some way and be connected with a bigger cause and higher purpose. I think all of us who knew him somewhat closely would have noticed his tremendous ability to enjoy the good things of life and revel in tales of exquisite taste and culinary experiences and other pleasures. And yet each one of us I think knew and had seen, one way or the other, his capacity to be least dependent on any such material props and, at any instance, be able to walk away from any situation without the least concern of how this may affect him, materially or physically. Yet, it will be less than honest to say that he did not care for material comfort or monetary accumulation. He was too conscious of his *dharma* as a householder to abdicate this responsibility. The telling difference was that, unlike legions of the upwardly mobile middle class, of which he was no doubt a member, to him the material achievements were but a means to an end and never an end in themselves. This, I believe, gave him an immense advantage, which he exploited to the full. It gave him the ultimate bargaining position, as nothing was not negotiable; it gave him the perch from which he could look at all aspects dispassionately and reach conclusions that eluded us.

But the question that comes to mind is whether he actually attained the state of being a witness (*sakshi*) and remained *tatashtha* (detached) in all aspects of his life. I had the great fortune of being able to discuss these issues during the period he was writing his Adhyatimik triology'. I considered myself to have been honoured in being given the opportunity to actually review and comment on two of the manuscripts and then to discuss them with him over long hours. Some of my comments were even incorporated! So I know that he intellectually understood these qualities better than most of us. But did he actually attain this *sakshi* state in his life? I am sure he was a witness to his own mortality and had conquered death well before it visited him. I saw this and experienced it every time I met him in the last ten years. So he was a witness in that supreme sense of having gone beyond the ultimate fear of death.

But did he carry this witness state in his other interactions and numerous functions that he performed as scholar, political activist, journalist, manager, friend or family man? In deference to his own dictum for complete honesty, I must confess that I cannot say he did. My simple basis for saying this is the counterfactual, that if Panditji had been able to be a sakshi in all his multifarious roles, he would have surely risen from being Rishi to Rajrishi, and enjoyed unparalleled success. As it happens, his considerable achievements notwithstanding, real crowning success seems to have eluded him. He initiated so many new ideas and innovations, collected a bevy of the best minds around him in these ventures and had the confidence of the highest and most powerful in the land. In all these he seems to have always come so close to achieving real

breakthroughs but never actually achieving the final successful culmination. Even in his scholarly pursuits, which I think were his true love despite all his multiple involvements, he left his best volume incomplete. Leaving that aside, it was in this academic pursuit that he could truly be with himself; his intellectual heritage and his vision was by far the most successful, ensuring his place in the annals of Indian intellectual and spiritual traditions.

But in other fields he might have gone much further had he accepted that others also had their own strengths, weaknesses, peculiarities and need for recognition. As a true witness that he always aspired to be, he would have surely seen this and built a team that is the ultimate tribute to a great mind and intellect. Possibly the Brahmin in him could not let him compromise on his own high standards and prevented him from building a team or school of thought. I am afraid even the ORF, which he founded and to which he devoted so much of this time, effort and attention, will find it difficult to carry his imprint in its future work. As his junior friend and often his intellectual sparring partner, I sincerely wish I had had the courage and the confidence to have brought this to his attention.

What did Panditji stand for? Which ism did he follow? I think he was above these categories. His deep roots in the Hindu tradition combined with his love for modernity and eagerness to try out the new and experience the next adventure gave him the capacity to fashion his own ideology. Ultimately he was a proud Indian who wanted to bring glory to this land. I think his long lasting, perhaps the longest lasting, relationship with Dhirubhai embodied and symbolized this completely. Nothing would stop either of them from working to bring greatness to India. And I was fortunate to have known him long and closely enough to have gained a fraction of his commitment to this country and its people.

I have to admit that I drifted away from him in the last six years, prior to re-starting my life back in Delhi. In retrospect this was unfortunate because I could not be with him when he was furiously penning his volumes on different aspects of spirituality. It was ironic that the drift started with my attempt to work with him and learn from him. But he chose to let my case be decided by one of his several functionaries and so the arrangement could not be finalized. I wish I had asked him his reasons because that would have helped me achieve another insight in to his method of working. But I still owe him a huge debt for having in his own inimitable manner brought home to me that life is finely nuanced and constantly a band of grey and not black and white. One of those amazing insights was and I quote: "Rajiv, the rupee coin should always be tested for its genuineness by rubbing it on your palm, but human beings should only be judged once as they don't change in their essential qualities." One of the many nuggets that I carry with me in his cherished memory.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

LEARNING FROM RK

Shashi Joshi, Bhagwan Josh

The year was 1978. In our research work we were wading through the archival material on the Indian National Movement. It was a great learning experience. In the process, we were re-discovering the methods and struggles of Gandhi as also the complexities of the British rule in India. Earlier, we had learnt our history, the history propagated by India's left, from R.P Dutt's India Today. How far away this man was from the real movement! Compared to the actuality of the mass movement how irrelevant and misleading his Marxist formulae were!

The process of research was also turning out to be a kind of rediscovery about the history of the Indian Left. Yet there was a lot that was common between the two movements during the colonial period. One point the two movements shared was their passion to reach out to the masses, the idea that it is the masses that make history. Our earlier language of Maoist radicalism fell apart; we were beginning to speak a new language of Indian politics.

Meanwhile, Primila Lewis had come back from jail and had written down her jail experiences of the infamous Emergency period. Somebody introduced us to her. She insisted that we meet RK This was our state of mind when we met RK.

Strangely enough, RK was not just the first intellectual who was able to understand our language, but he also spoke a language which echoed our new state of mind. What was totally new was that he was doing so with a degree of conviction and authority. And without any sense of 'psychological fear of the Left'; a common malaise afflicting the young and idealistic till today.

After a few random meetings, we formed a small group and began to meet regularly and discuss India's problems in various fields rather systematically. There could not be a better way of knowing each other. To begin with, politically, we perceived RK to be a sort of Left-Congressman. But his knowledge and command of India's traditional wisdom and textual traditions, above all his creative grasp of the history of the national movement, sharply distinguished him from any Leftist or Congress intellectuals we knew of.

RK spoke a language that closely resembled the discourse of a new 'Marxism' that we were becoming familiar with through our readings. Ultimately, we were to discover in him a unique individual and a complex personality. He was certainly above any party politics, convinced that

given our political system and party partisan attitudes, no political party could recognise the work done by rival political formations. All our political parties were operating through a sort of consensual political language in which everything was either white or black.

RK would complain: 'They go to the people after every five years and say: Look at our rivals, they have done nothing in the last five years. Their rule has ruined the country. This time give us the chance to wield power. We will transform the country. Suppose a new party forms the government then the same negative set of arguments will be repeated by their opponents to recapture power after five years.we are caught in the vicious circle of negative democracy.'

None of them, he clarified, can afford to tell the truth to the people, that no single party can carry out any meaningful transformation of a country of India's size within a period of five years. It is an impossibility. But the opportunity for power does return at the end of five years and it must be seized. In the absence of the recognition that your opponent could also do some good, only negative democracy can prevail, since each party of the country 'must' denounce the other in its appeals for votes. 'Denunciation', he would say, 'and not appreciation, comes to us naturally. No party can afford to tell the people that the rival party had also accomplished something in its tenure. Capturing power becomes the primary goal and development falls by the way side.'

The other problem that disturbed him greatly was the deliberate betrayal of our Constitution. He often used to say: 'We start our political process with a deliberate lie. The Constitution tells us how much must be spent on elections per candidate. All of us know that elections cannot be fought within those limits. All of us know this truth. Yet we refuse to change the Constitution to recognise even this simple truth. All political parties and candidates continue to file patently false returns of their expenditure election after election.. Why is it so? Because deep inside, we do not have any respect for this document. It is only a manifesto of our wishes.. We have no intention of actually implementing it.'

Every single ideology or party fell short of his expectations. He worked with a mosaic of different ideologies. Perhaps, it will be more appropriate to describe his mind, not as a meeting point but a 'space' where parties and ideologies could have a serious conversation with each other about their limitations, without mutual hostility; with a spirit of live and let live.

He had no problem in conducting serious discussions with H.S. Surjeet, Narasimha Rao, or L.K.Advani, or for that matter any other politician. No one was 'untouchable' when it came to the well-being of the Indian nation. His mind operated without any kind of self-censorship. He could tell every politician to his face what his inner feelings were about that party or leader. Probably they all visited him to hear this frank evaluation of

themselves. He could do this because he felt self-empowered and always thought of himself as nothing more than an ordinary patriot.

For him one of the causes of Hindu-Muslim tensions was that people knew so little about the true nature of their own respective religions. Here he articulated the Gandhian view that only a proper understanding of religions would be able to unite Indians. He used to say: ' What makes me sad is that texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata have come to be labeled as Hindu texts. If they were situated in western cultures, by now the whole world would have been reading them as truly universal texts of ethics and power. Non-Hindus do not read them because they are Hindu texts; Hindus do not read them because they think that they already know them. Colleges and universities do not teach and discuss them because they are supposedly not 'secular'. Only the illiterate masses are willing to learn something from them. What a strange education system we have, what a tragedy!'

Everyday, RK met scores of people and discussed their problems with them. He travelled throughout the country and met hundreds of ordinary people. 'This education has led me to two very fundamental conclusions', he once observed: 'One, almost all Indians are convinced that they cannot expect justice from the existing system; and two, that the Indian state is their real enemy.'

Again and again he would return to the theme of 'Partition' in our discussion. He felt that almost every problem of India today could be traced back to the consequences of Partition. 'How could our leaders even think of agreeing to this? They were all very wise men. Did they not realise what they were doing? How could they believe that this was a solution to Hindu-Muslim problems?' Yet, he overcame his anguish over what he thought were historical blunders by working with those who now sought friendship, understanding and a forward looking vision for both Pakistan and India.

Finally, no memoir of RK would make sense without speaking of his great humanism and simplicity in personal relationships. Except for him, we have yet to meet anyone till today who moved among the powerful and the rich and then came to our home and sat on the floor to eat with us when we did not possess even a chair to sit on. His childlike pleasure and deep interest in all of us whom he befriended, and his role in our lives, have left ineradicable memories of his warmth and goodness. He would help you and throw the good deed into the 'delete' folder; nothing he ever did for you was a 'favour', it was only 'natural' that he would want you to be happy.

To paraphrase Rumi, they never go away who live in your hearts.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

A TRUE FRIEND FROM INDIA

S.M. Waris

I heard the name of Mohtaram R.K. Mishraji for the first time in the summer of 1998. A reference to him came up in a telephone conversation with Dilip Kumar (Mohammed Yusuf Khan), who is a very close and dear friend of mine. Dilip Kumar talked at some length about his close friend R.K. Mishra, a well-respected journalist, a dynamic and visionary thinker and an ex-parliamentarian. He also mentioned that Mishraji enjoyed a very close relationship with the then Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. During a conversation with Dilip Kumar in Dubai the following week, I learned that both of them had decided to once again initiate back-channel diplomacy between Pakistan and India in an effort to ease the tensions between the two countries. I already knew that Dilip sahib had very cordial relations with the Indian Prime Minister and other high officials in the Indian government. As a Member of Parliament, it was his utmost desire to play a vital role in promoting peace between India and Pakistan, as he was born in Peshawar, Pakistan. He had also enjoyed a very good relationship with the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, who was a big fan of his. He had seen all of Dilip sahib's movies and had bestowed the highest civilian award upon him, the Nishan Imtiaz.

As desired by Dilip Kumar, I talked with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He immediately agreed to meet with Mishraji, so I arranged a meeting of the three personages at the residence of Mian Nawaz Sharif in London in September 1998.

This was the first time I met Mohtaram Mishraji and had the privilege to spend a few days with him in London. My first impression of him was that he was a courteous, kind- hearted and well-read person who was willing to devote all his energy to promoting peace between the two neighbouring countries. In that meeting, views were exchanged to prepare the ground for a meaningful meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan.

Dilip Kumar asked me to take care of Mishraji whenever he visited Pakistan and added that I should leave no stone unturned to facilitate the dialogue process, as he was working for a noble cause and was very close to him.

For the follow-up, Mohtaram Mishraji visited Pakistan on several occasions in 1998 and 1999. He met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan and other high officials in his efforts to improve understanding between the two countries, narrow down differences, and find solutions to the

problems that had bedevilled the relation between the two South Asian neighbours.

During these visits, he visited my home and we developed a close friendship. In fact, my children loved Mishraji, especially my daughter Sara, who was 11 years old at that time. They started chating on the internet, mainly about Shahrukh Khan and other Bollywood celebrities. My son Haris also became a personal friend of his. They spent a lot of time talking about Sachin Tendulkar and Wasim Akram.

At such times, he looked like a child of my children's age and I could never imagine that this was the same person who had authored many books and had explored the realms of philosophy, religious thoughts and beliefs and the mysteries of man's inner life.

It is no longer a secret that the sincere efforts of Mohtaram Mishraji and his counterparts in Pakistan paved the way for the historic meeting between two prime ministers in Lahore.

On 12 October 1999, General Pervez Musharaf took over Pakistan and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was arrested. Those who had been loyal to Sharif had to face the toughest time of their lives. I was not a politician, but had tried to play a positive role in the peace process and, therefore, was among those unseen and unheard persons who became victims of the military dictatorship. Over the next two weeks I was harassed, lost my business and some of my property and was forced to leave my country. I fled to America with my family, thinking that all of us would go back once the dust had settled down. It was a very difficult time for us. We had no money and no place to live. After spending one week in the basement of a cousin's friend, I started calling different friends and telling them my side of the story. I was hesitant about calling Mishraji about my miserable situation, since a lot of my close friends and even relatives were reluctant to give me any support out of fear of the military rule. I was not sure if Mishraji would even remember me. But somehow or the other, my children persuaded me to contact him. He was shocked and assured me that he would do anything within his means to help my family. He kept his promise and was one of the few generous people who came forward to assist us at that very difficult time of our lives.

Mishraji immediately sent one of his friends to the small town where I was living. His friend was quite surprised to see our living conditions. It was only due to him that we were able to buy kitchen utensils, mattresses, a TV and other necessary household items. That was not all. Within a few months, Mishraji himself came all the way from New Delhi to meet us. He was quite disturbed to learn the details and then made arrangements to keep our household running until we were able to cover our own expenses. More than the financial assistance, he always encouraged my family and me to have a faith in God Almighty in his many e-mails and

phone calls from India.

Meanwhile, when my immigration status was under review in America, some of my close friends were reluctant to send their affidavits as a testimony, possibly fearing military harassment. Mishraji sent his affidavit immediately and also inspired other relevant Indian friends to come forward. He even generously offered, if needed, to come personally to explain to the court my humble role in bringing peace between the two countries.

That was not all. The following year, Mishraji came once again with his wife, Mohtarma Renukaji and brought gifts, some money for my children, and above all provided me with a lot of meaningful advice. I still remember him telling me that I should try to think positively, be optimistic and never lose heart, for it is the wellspring of life. He also told me that he had met with Dilip Kumar to discuss my condition and had plans to go to London to meet Mian Sahib.

Meanwhile, I remained in touch with him through e-mails and telephone calls. He was not doing well and was undergoing treatment in America, New Delhi and Bangalore, but whenever he checked his e-mail, he would reply to me. One day before his sad demise, I sent him an e-mail inquiring about his well- being and received a reply from his secretary Mr. Jayan, who told me that Mishraji was no longer with us. It was one of the saddest days of my life. My entire family was literally weeping because we knew what we had lost. Mishraji had played a vital role in our lives.

As I had mentioned, Mishraji was not an old friend. I had met him only a few times in London, Islamabad and Bloomington, Indiana in America, but he left everlasting memories in our lives by being so kind and helpful. He was there when our close friends and relatives were not. He made our lives very special, just by being there for us. After his passing, I talked to Renukaji and told her that even if I became rich and powerful again, I would never be able to return his favours. I cannot return the kind of encouragement and faith he gave us. Every night before going to bed, I pray to God to give peace to his soul.

Bichraa kuch is ada se ke rut hi badal gai
Ek shakhs saree shaher ko veeran kar gaya
(His presence gone, the very season has changed One man's going, and the entire city is desolated)

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

A TRIBUTE TO R.K. MISHRAJI FROM HIS EDITOR

Vyvyan Mishra (Nee Cayley)

R K Mishraji and I first met seventeen years ago. Then, in 1997, he told me that he was proposing to write a series of books on the Vedas in fulfillment of a promise made to his Guru, Pandit Motilal Shastriji, who had requested Mishraji, his sole disciple, to write in English and disseminate the works to 1000 libraries around the world. Panditji counselled his student not to be perturbed if the books were not really understood during his lifetime, as their message would be fully realised in the century to follow. Mishraji invited me to edit his books, an offer I gladly accepted.

And so began our work. We were rarely in the same country, so very little of the work could be done together, sitting at the same desk. We primarily relied on technology, with which Papa (as I came to call him) was supremely comfortable. Emails with chapter attachments would go back and forth—my first edit, Papa's response, my second edit, Papa's response, and so on. Sometimes chapters would go through three or four edits before proceeding to the proof reading stage and then to publication. In the documents I returned to him would be my questions on the use of certain terminology, alerts to the possibility of misinterpretation by those unfamiliar with the concepts and/or linguistic context, requests for clarification of conceptual pathways that appeared somewhat unclear to me; and occasionally I might even offer additional notions or metaphors for his consideration. Our emails would often be detailed and technical—with references to incomplete footnotes, or alterations to paragraph sequencing, Papa's fine- tuning of expression—but always with fondness and humour and news about our lives and those of family and friends. In the process of this work we became colleagues and, more importantly, friends.

My background and prevailing framework of thought is the classical (Nyingma) school of Tibetan Buddhism. This was what I brought to the humbling task of editing such refined works on Vedic wisdom. Yet, for all that, Papa and I never became polarised. We never locked horns on matters of opinion or belief; we never became divided in our approach or perceived priorities; and we never lost sight of the purpose and goal of his work.

Papa was, for me, a sign painter. Using words, concepts, metaphors and analogies, he painted signposts along the path to this goal, which itself is the inexpressible Truth. It may seem unwise to employ concepts to describe the non- conceptual but, as he explained to me, we need to know what we are looking at when we finally see it for ourselves. Let's say you

want to visit Rishikesh. You can only say you 'know' it when you reach it, explore it, become familiar with it and feel its heartbeat. But to arrive there, in the first place you must rely on the road signs so that you don't get lost, and so that when you get there you can say to yourself: 'Ah, so this is Rishikesh.' Similarly, Papa's books are the roadmap to discovering, or uncovering, the nature of consciousness and of reality. I cannot do justice in words to the sense of privilege I feel for having been the one to dot the 'i's and cross the 't's on his signposts!

My Tibetan Buddhist teacher quotes a saying which must, I'm sure, have originated in ancient India: "In a sandalwood forest, even an ordinary tree will carry the scent of sandalwood." If even the tiniest amount of Papa's understanding has rubbed off on me as a result of my work for him, that is an incalculable reward.

In the spirit of this gratitude, I would like to share what I believe to be Papa's final oral teaching. In the last week of his life an ardent seeker came to Bangalore to meet him. She confessed to being a reluctant reader; and yet she had found herself unable to put down his four volumes and had read them avidly day and night, through to the final pages. Papa invited her to ask questions if she had any. Respectful of his frailty, she confined herself to just one and, in so doing, went straight to the heart of the matter. "Uncle-ji," she said eagerly. "Please tell me, what is the real purpose of our life here on earth?" Papa quietly replied: "One must know oneself," he said. "That is all."

These words are the distilled essence of his work, for, as he explains to his readers, to know oneself at the deepest level is to understand the whole of reality. And since this is the only key to the door of liberation, it is all that we need to know and all that we need to do.

Thank you, Papa, from the depths of my heart.

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